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By SAMUEL MERWIN

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SILK

By Samuel Merwin

A STORY of ancient China and of the adventures of Jan Po on a secret mission to the court of Roxanna, the Virgin Queen of Balk (Persia), to learn the ultimate destination of the silk export on which the prosperity of China depends.

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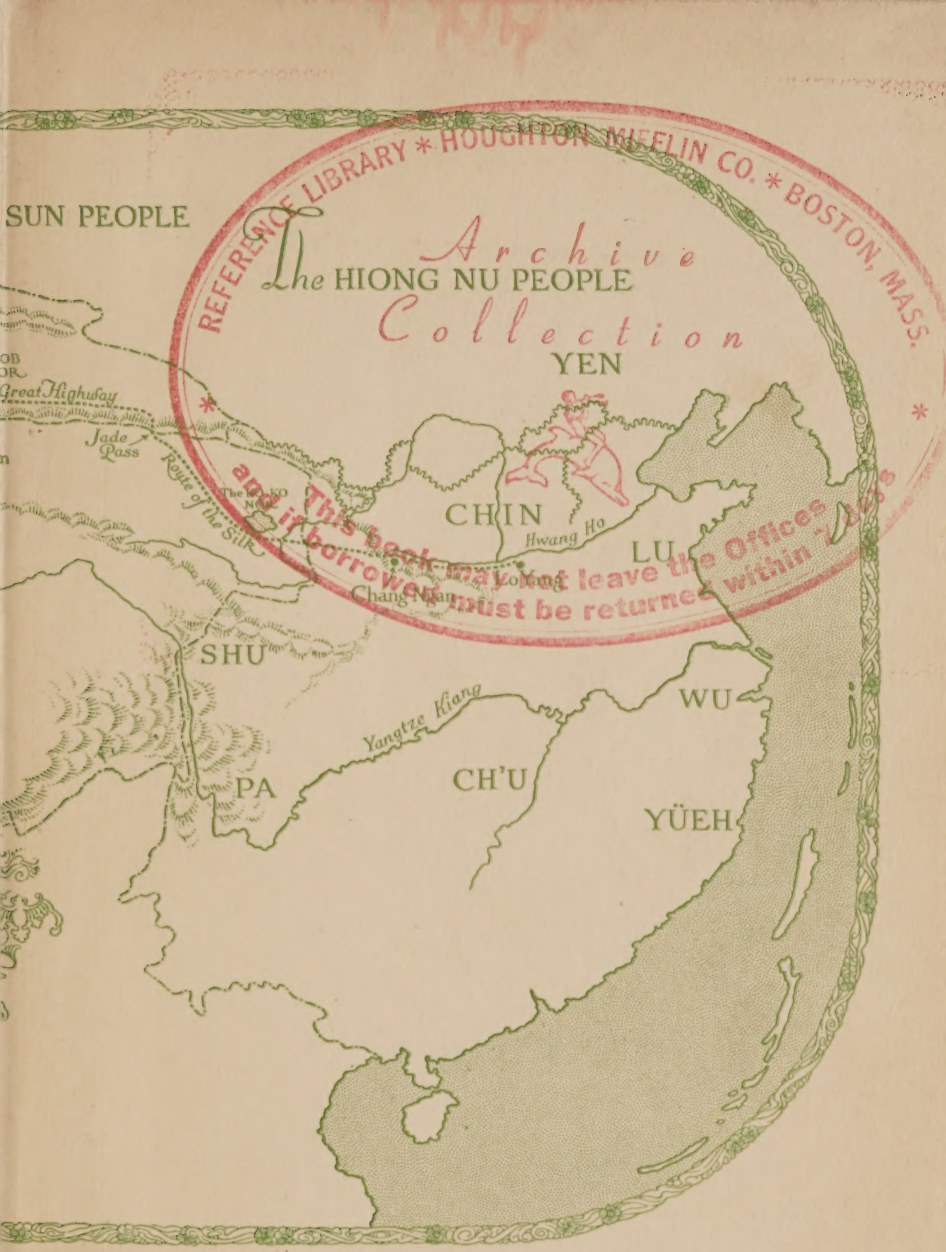

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BEFORE ME SAT THE VIRGIN QUEEN (*page* 58)

SILK

A Legend

AS NARRATED IN THE JOURNALS AND CORRESPONDENCE OF *JAN PO*

BY

SAMUEL MERWIN

ILLUSTRATED BY

N. C. WYETH

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A Legend

AS NARRATED IN THE JOURNALS
AND CORRESPONDENCE OF *JAN PO*

THE PRINCIPAL PERSONS OF THE NARRATIVE

in the order in which their names occur

JAN PO himself, whose great adventure we are to follow.

GENERAL PAN CH'AO, on whom, for his achievement in pacifying the Northwestern frontier and opening the continental highway for the immense traffic in silk with Asia Minor and Rome, was conferred the honorific title of General Protector. He died A.D. 102.

WEN FUI, one-time student companion of Jan Po, now a secretary at the Yamen or Palace in the frontier city of So Kui, the present Yarkand.

KAN YING, "the five-bottle poet" and first Chinese explorer of the Persian region, we are to know only through hearsay.

HSU SHEN, who compiled the first dictionary of the Chinese language; like Wen Fui a student companion of Jan Po and at the time of the narrative his dearest friend. He dwelt at Lo Yang, then capital of China, and we are to know him only through Jan Po's correspondence.

THE PRINCE IMPERIAL of the Chinese Royal Family, who appears first in person disguised as a secretary and under the name of CH'ING PAO CH'IEN.

THE WA ZIR OF BALKH, IBN SHU BER DIN. The kingdom of Balkh bordered on what is to-day northeastern Persia or ancient Parthia.

THE QUEEN OF BALKH, ROXANA, who claimed descent from Iskander or Alexander the Great by a daughter of the king of Samarcand.

MOSULLA, a slave girl from the Wa Zir's harem.

LU CH'EN CH'IA, younger son of Duke Lu of the Chinese Court.

CH'ENG PO-I, a general in the frontier army of Protector-General Pan Ch'ao.

SILK

A Legend

AS NARRATED IN THE JOURNALS AND CORRESPONDENCE OF *JAN PO*

— native of P'ing Ling in Shansi, pupil of Ma Ch'ung at Lo Yang, mandarin of the eighth rank with button of worked gold.

The time is near the end of the first century after Christ; the "So Kui" of our Jan is the city of Yarkand.

Trajan, newly emperor at Rome, had not yet begun the invasion of Parthia. In China the dynasty of the Later Han had ripened fully in commerce, military power, and the arts.

So Kui. Forenoon

UNLIKE the more than a hundred caravansaries built by General Pan Ch'ao along the great north-western highway, this inn is foreign. It is built of a mud that hardens and endures in the dry climate, two stories in height, roofed with poplar poles over which reeds are laid, the whole surmounted with sod. It was strange but rather charming, when I looked out this morning, to see a pleasant array of spring flowers growing on the neighboring

roofs. And I lay not upon the familiar k'ang of our taverns, but on a frame of wood. For thus, in this remote land, they make their beds. And the rug that covered me, in lieu of a quilt, though skillfully enough woven, was barbarously rich in color and design. These frontier tribes, I find, make much of their rugs.

Even the window is an oddity, for there is neither wooden grill nor oiled paper, but merely a large rectangular opening through which, as I write, I can see, far in the west, the white summits of the T'song Ling, that immense mountain barrier beyond which lie Yue Che, Anhsi, Ta Tsin, and the edge of the world.

A note from Wen advises me that General Pan will receive me at noon. It was something of a surprise to learn, on my arrival last evening, that the Commander is here in person on this farthest of frontiers. His general headquarters lie far back to the eastward.

It is one hundred and twenty-six days since I rode out of the Ch'ien gate at Lo Yang and turned my face toward Shensi and the great desert beyond. Eight days have been taken up with unavoidable delays, one hundred and eighteen in travel. I have traversed the world, from very near the eastern edge to a point very near the western. I am utterly

weary of mind, but my skin is bronzed and my health excellent.

Why old General Pan sent for me I cannot imagine. To be sure, he was my father's friend, in P'ing Ling. As a child, I remember sitting on his knee. Evidently he has not forgotten me. And if I am really to have his interest in whatever work I may be set at out here, there should be opportunities to make money and to advance in rank. I shall keep my mouth closed, but my eyes open.

Wen said in his note that he would look in on me during the morning. Perhaps he will advise me regarding funds. The cost of this long journey has been distressing. Wen has been here more than a year now, and should know the local situation pretty well.

As I look back over all I have been able to observe during this extraordinary journey, it is the silk trade that stands out. Silk is shipped westward both raw and in finished forms, but the merchants with whom I have talked at the inns tell me that by far the greatest bulk of it is made up into a thin gauze such as we see very little of in China. Apparently there is a tribe somewhere beyond the frontier whose women wear it that way. Really, however, I can't imagine what sort of a tribe it can be that will permit its women to array themselves

in transparent silks. Even among the Hiong Nu of the North, as I observed them during my captivity of more than a year, such conduct would be regarded as loose in the extreme. I can only hope that the women are better to look at than those of the Hiong Nu and the Wu Sun.

The really striking fact regarding this export, however, is the extent of it. I am told that of all the camels traversing the great highway fully two thirds carry silk on the westward journey. The other third of the traffic is made up of furs (martens and foxes), porcelain and bronze, cast iron, lac, jade (which they pick up in Kho Tan), incense, rhubarb, cubeb berries, and other odds and ends, but much of this lesser traffic is borne by asses and mules or in ox carts.

I relieved the tedium of the journey by trying to estimate the magnitude of this traffic in silk. As my instructions were to travel at express speed, I was continually overtaking large numbers of camels moving along in their deliberate way or resting by the roadside, sometimes fifty or seventy-five in a caravan, sometimes two or three hundred. Every night the inn-compound would be filled with them, and hundreds were grouped outside the walls. Lying at night on my k'ang, in the mood of pleasant contemplation that is the gateway to slumber, I

could every night hear them munching and breathing and stirring about. At the larger centers, like Tun Hwang and Char Chan, there were thousands. Frequently I rode all day, on my pony or in my litter, between long strings of the creatures that extended as far ahead and behind as I could see. And it is true that nearly all of those westbound were laden with bales of silk. . . . I fell then to counting the returning camels that passed us, at times, all day long. They are joined up in strings of twenty to forty, each with a ring in his ugly nose. The lowest number, in any one day, was six hundred and twenty-four, the highest a little more than thirty-two hundred, the average over a period of twenty days not far from two thousand.

It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that we ship not less than, say, five thousand tan of silk a day. That, of course, would be five hundred thousand chin. That much *in one day!* In a year, even making full allowance for the somewhat lighter traffic of winter over these northern wastes, the value of this amount of silk in our own cities would amount to about one hundred million mace. It is worth much more out here on the frontier; probably double that, after all the costs of carriage are paid and the local trader has taken his profit. . . . And now I cannot resist asking myself what manner of

tribe this can be that is in a position to pay upwards of two hundred million silver mace a year for our silk — far upwards, for there is still more transporting to be done beyond the mountains, it seems, and further profits to be taken — merely because its women must be indulged. The Hiong Nu, in the days of their strength, when the Emperor Hwang Ti built the Great Wall to protect our people from their marauding attacks, couldn't have bought a tenth as much. Furthermore, the western edge of the world is not more than forty days' journey from this very So Kui. I have my map spread before me as I write, and can measure precisely. Where is there room for so powerful and numerous a people? And why have we not heard more of them? . . . The name of this nation is Ta Tsin.

This very inn is a humming center of the traffic in silk. The spacious courtyard is crowded with camels. Porters are constantly at work carrying the bales of silk to and from the warehouses that stand within the compound. I find, indeed, that the merchants who frequent the inn are all connected with the silk trade. . . . At this point I should record an odd custom. There is a river in the T'song Ling mountains (known among the natives as the Pa Mir) which marks the western-

most boundary of the Empire of Han. Beyond this stream no Chinese subject may step. That is the law, enforced by the soldiers of General Pan. It is further the law that our traders may not communicate in any way with those of Yue Che, which is the tribal name of the people immediately beyond the T'song Ling. Accordingly, it is the practice of our traders to carry the silk up into the mountains and deposit it in open warehouses that stand for a great distance along the bank of this certain river. They indicate on each bale the price they are willing to accept, in silver or in other foreign commodities — for example, a remarkable red shell known as coral, rubies of a notable size and purity, a brownish gum called amber that may be carven into ornaments as we carve jade, skins of a delicate sweet wine made of grapes, boxes of raisins, which are the same dried, and also boxes of a curious dye called henna, kegs of honey (a sweet liquid), wool in bags, broken almonds, laudanum, copper and tin.

When our traders have thus marked their wares and withdrawn, those of Yue Che come down to the warehouses, remove the bales of silk (and other commodities, as may be), and leave in their stead precisely the goods demanded. For so widely are the sons of Han known and respected for their

probity in all commercial transactions that neither the prices nor representations as to the contents of the bales are ever questioned. So it has been, they tell me, since the beginnings of this trade, and so it must be wherever the glory of Han civilization illuminates the outer barbarian night.

Evening. The same day

My writing, this morning, was interrupted by Wen's call.

Wen has changed. He is no longer the sunny, comical Wen Fui of our student days, but a shrewd and reserved young mandarin. He doesn't laugh as he used, but smiles in a condescending way. He went to the Yamen with me for my audience with the General Protector, with the understanding that we should afterwards visit his quarters for luncheon.

It was pleasant to find the familiar blue carts of China at the courtyard gate to convey us to the Yamen. The native carts here have solid wheels taller than a man and creak frightfully. And the Yamen grounds, with their three ceremonial gates, their dragon walls and the roofs of green tile curving up among the poplar trees, were like a bit of the homeland.

My reception was more that of an honored friend

than of an under-secretary. Instead of dismounting at the second gate, we were driven through the third to the inner courtyard. Wen, I could see, was surprised. And his manner stiffened for a time. He knows no more than I why I was sent for.

General Pan greeted me cordially as the son of his friend. He begins to show his years, which must number nearly seventy; his hair and mustache are white. But he still stands erect and moves and speaks with commanding dignity; a majestic figure, indeed, in his embroidered robes, with a ruby thicker than my thumb on his hat and the peacock feather slanting over his shoulder.

He took the seat by the left-hand wall. Wen and another secretary sat opposite, while I had the place of honor on the cushioned k'ang. After a few moments of general talk, His Excellency fingered his tea-cup and glanced at the two secretaries. Naturally they had to bow and leave. And of course I took pains that my jubilant feelings should not appear on my countenance, but bowed courteously. It was a delightful moment.

His Excellency then said: "I am told that you have knowledge of the Hunnish tongues."

Recalling the precept of Confucius, "The truly good man is slow of speech," and naturally desiring

to make the best impression possible, I considered this remark thoughtfully, and then replied:

"It has been my privilege to learn somewhat of the Hiong Nu language, and a little of the Wu Sun."

"And you find them, I imagine, not widely dissimilar."

"No, Your Excellency. Both are syllabic and based on simple alphabets from some common root. Even the word forms are similar."

"So I have understood." I could see plainly enough that he was studying me. "I am pleased to inform you that I have chosen you for a certain significant task. We are told that an artisan who wishes to show good workmanship must begin by sharpening his tools, and therefore you will do well to familiarize yourself with the language of the Yue Che who live beyond the mountains. You will find it not unlike the Wu Sun speech. The only marked difference is a recent mixture with it of phrases from the Anhsi, farther west. A teacher will be sent you this evening."

I bowed gravely.

"And now," he continued, "let me ask about your journey."

"It was in itself an education, Your Excellency."

"Indeed! And what thing in particular caught your interest?"

"The enormous quantity of silk that is being shipped to the westward. I am told that most of it is purchased by a people known as the Ta Tsin."

"That is so."

"And if I may venture the remark to Your Excellency, I am at a loss to find on my map the space for so considerable a people as these."

He smiled and said, "A great deal lies beyond the mountains." Then added, "But your remark about the magnitude of the silk traffic indicates a thoughtful and inquiring mind. That traffic is the cornerstone of our vast Western Empire. Without it, I and my armies would not be here, the great highway across the desert would again be a mere trail, without landmarks or hostelries, and subject to the raids or the taxation of every little nomad khan along the way. The wealth it brings to China would support any other empire in the world — save one. And it is a complete monopoly, the greatest monopoly in the world. Not only is the produce of the silkworm confined to our own Middle Kingdom and Kho Tan, but the means of its production is unknown in other lands. Many have been the efforts of the Yue Che and others to penetrate this secret. It is generally believed be-

yond the mountains that the silk is made from a plant, as linen is, though some hold that it is a floss scraped from the leaves of a certain tree."

I am afraid that at this point my countenance exhibited more emotion than is permissible to the truly noble of spirit. Certainly I was surprised and impressed.

"Understanding this," he concluded, "you will readily perceive why it has been necessary to guard our secret with the utmost caution. Let the western peoples begin making their own silk and China will suffer an irreparable blow. Therefore I have been forced to decree that whoever discusses the culture of silk within the hearing of natives of the frontier shall be slain. There are spies here. The native servants are difficult to distinguish from the Yue Che. Therefore, you will find it best to keep your own counsel. Trust no one. Particularly as your own work may soon prove to be of peculiar importance."

He fingered his tea-cup then. I rose and bowed, but before going I remarked — rather aptly, I think —

"Has not the Master said, 'Do not use your eyes, your ears, your power of speech, or your faculty of movement without obeying the inner law of self-control?'"

"True," responded His Excellency. "You will, I think, find your work not uninteresting. And I trust the high altitude of this region will have no ill effect on your health or your spirits."

"'The man of virtue finds pleasure in the mountains,'" I quoted quickly.

"'For the man of virtue is calm,'" said he, capping my allusion.

And then, in high spirits, I departed.

I am asking myself now, as I write, just what he meant in intimating that there can be on the earth another empire comparable with ours. It is puzzling. . . .

Wen was waiting in his cart outside. I could see that he was burning with curiosity. Shut in by the curtains of my own cart, as we rode across the city, I made the most of the few moments of solitude, composing my thoughts and considering what attitude I should take with Wen. A degree of serenity I must attain, for we know that it is the inferior sort of man who becomes agitated at any time.

I knew from the expression on Wen's face that he would find adroit ways to draw me out regarding the interview from which he himself had been excluded. He did it, misleadingly, by tendering me confidences of his own; beginning, indeed, before I could dismiss the lictors who followed

close on our heels with presents from General Pan. Among these were two bottles of the delicious wine of the Yue Che. Naturally I had these set at once on the luncheon table; and I felt that Wen welcomed the wine as a means of loosening my lips. Certainly he drank less of it than I did.

"I am delighted to see you beginning your life out here in this auspicious way," he said, as we drank. "From the first, it is plain, you are to be one of us. It is the policy of General Pan to talk with each of us in private. To each he entrusts some small detail of his policy, and we are supposed not to confide in one another. The complete plans are thus in no single mind besides his own. But of course" — Wen waved a graceful hand — "we are all thrown together a good deal; there is no social life here outside the Yamen; and we come little by little to understand one another pretty well. Every Yamen, as you will know, is a whispering gallery. There is much that you should learn by way of background to your particular task."

Thus he set to work to weave his web about me. He continued:

"There has been an intrigue afoot for upwards of a year. It took me several months to unravel what I am glad to give you on your first day here: though I confess the picture is far from complete

in my mind. There is a line here, a bit of color there, but many spaces of the bare silk. . . . The Yue Che, you will understand, are an ambitious people. Formerly but one of a number of nomadic tribes of the north, and driven over the mountains as a result of the westward drift of the Hiong Nu, they have prospered there. A few years ago, their Chief Minister, known as Wa zir, had the impudence to ask a Princess of our Imperial house for wife to their young King. Naturally General Pan arrested their envoys, seized the gifts they were bearing, and packed them off whence they came. . . . Pan, you will find, really is a great man. He has conquered and stabilized this whole vast northwestern region. He carved out the empire across which the product of our millions of Chinese looms is now poured in an endless stream. The Regency, you know, have conferred on him the title of General Protector. It is a deserved honor. With this frontier under a weaker hand than his we should soon lose our silk. And that would be a disaster to China. He must have touched on that problem during your talk. We have all had our warnings."

"I have had my warning, yes," I replied, guardedly.

"Something more than a year ago, it seems — about the time I came out here — the Yue Che

began pressing us again, but not directly this time. The young King who desired an Imperial wife is now dead. Poisoned, doubtless. Whispers reach us now and then from the Yue Che, you will understand. His sister, a girl of seventeen or eighteen, is now their Queen."

"I can see her," I put in at this point — "a flat-faced, dumpy little Hun!"

He smiled, poured out more wine for me, and remarked: "Perhaps. Though the Yue Che blood is by this time somewhat mixed. It is more than two centuries since they were driven over the mountains. . . . But to continue: the attention of the Yamen has been drawn rather sharply of late to these curious activities of the Yue Che. We have not yet fathomed the motive. Certainly they are making a remarkable effort to reach the court at Lo Yang without General Pan's full knowledge. In subtle ways they are trying to penetrate the barrier of this frontier. Why, we frankly do not know. Early in the winter two envoys appeared, bearing royal credentials and a caravan of presents, and innocently enough asked permission to travel onward to Lo Yang and offer their gifts in person at the throne.

"Pan seized them, of course. It was not the season for the annual tribute. Furthermore, they

knew well enough that none of the Yue Che or the Sogdians or other border tribes are permitted to cross our lines. The presents, from the Virgin Queen —"

"Virgin?" I cried, incredulously. "An eighteen-year-old Hunnish girl?"

Wen nodded. "That is the common belief. They guard her as the most precious of rubies. From babyhood nurses and teachers have surrounded her and eunuchs have stood guard."

"You puzzle me, really," said I. "You speak as if the Yue Che had developed a civilization."

"Oh, in a measure, they have. You see, they long ago encountered superior peoples."

I bent my mind now on the task of following his narrative, concluding it better to exhibit no surprise however wild his statements might seem. But I know the Huns. And we are told that rotten wood cannot be carved.

"Among the presents were rubies such as the world has never known. They have mines of them, it appears. There were bronzes and earthenware objects of quaint foreign design, vases of silver and gold — oh, really an extraordinary collection. Among other things were egg shells, apparently from some enormous bird, fully a span in length, and some long feathers more beautiful than any

we have excepting those of the peacock — feathers with a softly curling fringe extending the whole length.

"I was given the interesting task of questioning the older of the envoys. We had found on his person a picture of his Queen that was painted quite charmingly on an oval bit of ivory. From this —" he spoke dryly — "I should say that she might be regarded as a rather attractive young person. More interesting still was a seal, a thumb in width, in design a young huntress slaying a tiger, carved with considerable skill on a hard, bluish stone — chalcedony or sapphirine. The miniature painting was concealed within his belt, while he wore the seal in a pouch that was hung about his neck, within his robes. Regarding these he had, evidently, a personal message to deliver from his Queen to our Prince Imperial . . . yes, the embassy was frankly accredited to the Prince! . . . Doubtless by this device the Queen or those about her hoped to persuade General Pan to pass the envoys through. But the General, naturally, acted without hesitation. This leader of the envoys was a kindly old man with an enormous white beard all over his face. We tortured him slowly and with care, leaving his tongue in to the very last in order that he might yield his secret instructions."

"The Yue Che did not resent this treatment of their envoys?"

"Oh, yes. They went so far as to send an embassy to the Wu Sun to arrange an alliance against us. But General Pan seized those envoys as well and packed them off home. The Queen submitted then, and sent her tribute through as usual."

"General Pan has great power," I remarked.

"He must have. You will soon come to see the necessity. The fact is, nobody in Lo Yang is capable of understanding the conditions out here. Their minds are closed to new truths. By one foolish step, were Pan less the iron-handed General Protector that he is, they might easily lose to China not only the silk trade, but an empire as well. Try writing home to your friends something of what you are learning of new worlds and strange civilizations. Their replies will disconcert you. They will regard you either as a spinner of traveler's tales or as a madman. They will even resist these truths, as distorting their accepted knowledge of the earth. Try it! Write it all to Hsu Shen, your friend, whose tolerance is even wider than his knowledge, and see what sort of reply you will have when one of the autumn caravans brings it through!" Wen smiled in his knowing way that I begin to find somewhat irritating. "You see,"

he concluded, "we are on the ground and acquainted with the facts. We learn to smile and hold our counsel. And we know that Lo Yang had better not concern itself with what it cannot understand. That, I can assure you, is the attitude of our Commander. And he is right. It is best so — best for China."

I was at a loss how to accept this bold statement. It had a plausible ring, but my brain was responding somewhat painfully to these new demands on it. Wen poured more wine, and I hastened to drink. I found it soothing to my excited faculties.

He continued:

"Possibly General Pan told you of Kan Ying's journey?"

He was at me again! I gave no sign. But I felt a pleasant glow in all my veins from the wine; and decided, shrewdly, I think, to sip it more slowly.

"That was last year. You recall Kan?"

"Not the five-bottle poet?"

"The same. He is older now, and has, in a measure, reformed his habits. During the fighting out here he became a general of brigade. Because of his literary attainments General Pan sent him out across the Yue Che country and Anhsi to the Southern Sea, there to take ship to far-away Ta Tsin. He was gone five months. There is a great

port in Southern Anhsi, where shipping gathers from all the world. The junks from our own southern harbors, even, are seen there."

"But that is absurd!" I cried.

"It is not, my dear friend." He poured more wine. "Kan Ying himself told me much. He talked there with a ship captain eight months out of Kin Say."

"Utterly absurd!" I cried again. "Surely any man with the slightest knowledge of geography — "

He interrupted me, with that cool smile:

"Jan, this you will soon have to accept as truth — for truth it is — the knowledge of actual world geography in our own land is slight, indeed."

What could I say to this? He appeared to possess facts against which I could match only tradition. I felt myself suddenly becoming very angry, and drank more of the wine to steady myself. The cool, delicate flavor of the foreign fruit lingered pleasantly on my palate long after the fluid had gone on to my stomach. . . . I must carry some of this wine home with me when I return. How dear old Hsu Shen would love it! How brilliantly would his fancy soar as our talk quickened, and what mellow songs we would sing! Yes, we shall have a night of it, Hsu and I!

"Kan's journey was rather inglorious," Wen

continued. He seemed farther away now, a remotely smiling figure whose voice floated gently across a wide space to my ears. "At this port, which lies near the mouth of a great river known as the Euphrates, he was advised that the onward journey to Ta Tsin by sea would consume many months more and that it might be two years before he could return. Indeed, they urged him to carry supplies for at least three years. Kan, at this, evidently grew chicken-hearted, though he explained at the Yamen on his return that he lacked money and equipment for so large an undertaking. . . . But this is what interested me: Kan himself told me fully, even incautiously, over the wine. While at this seaport, he became acquainted with two envoys from this same Queen of the Yue Che who were bearing gifts and messages of loyalty and submission to our Prince Imperial. These men actually set sail thence, on a junk of Kin Say. Naturally I reported all this to General Pan. Possibly he mentioned it during your audience."

I kept firmly silent.

"It would indicate that the firm hand of our Protector on this frontier is not enough. The Yue Che, perhaps, are too smart for us. It is disturbing. We may yet be forced to invade their country

and destroy it. They deserve no less. Though I realize, after your so distinguished reception, that all this may be to you already an old story. In any event, we shall draw together, you and I. And I assure you it will be a pleasure to help you in every way. Confidentially, within the privacy of your quarters or mine, I shall tell you all I know or learn. We secretaries have to stand together." He filled my cup again. "I presume General Pan outlined your work for you. Did he speak in particular of the silk, or of the Yue Che?"

I raised the cup to my lips; and then, because my hand shook in a telltale way, lowered it. There seemed no harm, at that moment, in relating to my old friend what small matters the Protector had discussed with me. Naturally, as my thoughts dwelt on the significance of that private audience, my breast warmed and swelled with pride, and it seemed to me that I should permit my dear old friend to share in my happiness. Besides, what had His Excellency said that couldn't with the utmost propriety be repeated? I can recall now, in looking back over the scene, that these rapid changes of mood were perplexing. It seemed not wholly normal that I should feel so warmly toward Wen hardly three flicks of a wren's tail after I had felt nothing but indignation toward him. I was by no

means drunk. Certainly my memory of all that took place is clear.

However, I was about to relate my brief experience at the Yamen, when a young woman came into the room, stopped short as her eyes fell on me, and then smiled, as unabashed as any boy.

Wen greeted her with a smile, called her to his knee, and filled his own cup for her. She drank the wine, laughed merrily, and held out the cup for more.

The incident is so close in memory that I cannot analyze it dispassionately. I repeat that I was positively not drunk. Now, as I set down these notes, my head is clear and there is none of the discomfort that usually follows a real drinking bout. The woman — or girl; she was quite young — certainly wore no veil. There seemed to her, evidently — and this is what I cannot understand at all — nothing in the least degree strange in her conduct. The civilized custom which prohibits the young women of a man's household from appearing in the presence of other men might quite as well, for all her care-free good humor, have never had so much as an origin. Either she knew nothing of it, or she ignored it. After the second cup she laughed boldly and (I must admit) musically, and throwing her arms about Wen's neck placed her lips against his in a curious manner.

Naturally the scene was repugnant to me. I rose, and with a courteous bow walked to the door. It was necessary, in order to reach it, that I should pass around the table. At this point — though, I must repeat, my mind was as clear as it is now; I was certainly not drunk — my legs refused to act in their customary manner. Indeed, I failed utterly in my efforts to make the necessary turn, and instead walked straight on and in some way, doubtless tripping over the rug or another small obstacle, sank momentarily to the floor.

The young woman at this point laughed so immoderately that I felt obliged to turn toward her with an indignant glance.

Promptly, with extraordinarily lithe freedom of movement — for these native women all have feet of the natural size, and I cannot make it plain how ungainly they appear at first sight — she leaped away from Wen and ran over to help me up. Think of it! A woman, in the home of a friend, actually taking me by the arm, ignoring the protests of a gentleman and assisting him to his feet! She was remarkably strong, I thought.

But then occurred the most amazing and unnerving thing. After a roguish look toward my friend — a look of complete abandon — she clasped my elbows, held me at arm's length, and surveyed

me for a moment (during which I reflected, not without a degree of complacency, that I am several inches taller than Wen, who is of Southern extraction), and then, clasping her arms about my neck in turn, placed her lips against mine in that same curious way. Wen promptly rushed over, and with considerable irritation drew her away.

I will say no more of that. Naturally I called for Ying, my servant, who was waiting on the doorstep, and commanded him to escort me home.

Wen followed me to the door and said, in a low voice — I am quite clear on this:

"We all come around to it out here. After these spirited creatures you'll find that our Chinese women seem pretty tame. Yes, you will!"

To this I naturally offered no reply, but walked away with dignity, Ying holding my arm and supporting me, as I was still troubled with that slight difficulty in controlling my legs.

I am seated at a table by the queer rectangular window. The innkeeper has supplied two lamps of bronze in order that I may work at night. Pausing at times and shielding my eyes, I can see the white tops of the mountains, dimly, far off, in the wistful moonlight. They seem to hang in their remote majesty above the plain like a symbol of

the protection of Heaven spread over the Empire of the Han.

In a measure the spectacle restores my spirit. I have suffered this day a series of most disconcerting shocks. My mind is slow to adapt itself to all I have seen and heard.

Regarding these round-eyed native women, I feel perturbation. I noticed them, not unnaturally, at various of the villages along the highway. At first I took it rather for granted that all those who appeared so shamelessly in public were of the lowest class; but this, I gather now, is not the case. Even the more gently bred among them, I am told, do not bind the feet as our women do; they have indeed no outer mark of gentility. They do not even wear their nails long. And they move about as freely as the young men. It is confusing. If it were not so evident that, through some power of attraction I cannot understand at all, they seem able to arouse in the breast of my countrymen an intensity of emotion that should be reserved only for the more sacred emotion of friendship, I should give the matter little thought. But, as is already plain, one of these women has made it impossible for Wen and myself to keep up even the pretense of friendship. And with friendship gone, what is to become of honor among men, of frank speech and

simple comradeship? Woman can have no place in these finer understandings. She is by nature a primitive animal. Her proper task is to prepare the food and bear male children. Given the slightest freedom she becomes a disturber. . . . When I bring myself to face soberly the fact that not only our frontier army but the Yamen as well is honeycombed with feminine desire and feminine intrigue, I am appalled. If it be true that these creatures possess attractions of person or some gift of exciting the senses that is unknown among the women of China, then the danger is the greater!

After their return home, these men who have surrendered to this sort of thing will be restless and unhappy. Our well-ordered social life will seem tame to them, as Wen so cynically intimates. Their influence in every community they touch will be unhealthy, subversive of order as of honor, undermining the home! It may even be that in this splendid conquest of General Pan, which has brought the very borders of the western world in subjection under our feet, lie the seeds of a disorder hitherto unknown in our land. . . . I cannot understand why the Protector permits such things to go on. When I am more closely in his confidence, after a little time I shall bring the matter to his attention. A decree to the effect that the feet of female children

be bound, as in China, would help in forming the moral character of later generations and might well have a deterrent effect on the license of the present one. And attractive women should certainly be forbidden to appear on the streets or freely among men. And it might be a good plan to kill a certain proportion of the female infants, leaving only enough for procreative purposes.

I find difficulty in determining a reasonable attitude toward Wen. I cannot very well conceal my disapproval of his course. He is an utterly changed man. I dislike him. It may even be necessary, first or last, to make an effort to arouse in him some memory of the noble civilization he has in his heart forsworn. Has not Confucius plainly said, "It is a law of nature that man should control woman and permit her no mind of her own"? And are we not taught thus? — "In conversation a woman should not be forward, but should conform with what is correct. The deportment of females should be grave and sober, yet always adapted to the occasion; whether in waiting on her parents, or reverencing her husband, rising up or sitting down, in times of mourning or in fleeing from war, she should be invariably decorous. Rearing the silkworm and making cloth are the most important of her duties. Preparing and serving the food for her

husband and setting in order the sacrifices follow next in order, and each must be seen to. After them study and learning may fill up the time." If there is still a little unspoiled good left in Wen's nature, it may be that by recalling to him certain of these noble precepts of our childhood and student days it would be possible to bring him to his senses. Oughtn't I at least to make the effort?

The women are less ugly, I think, than they seemed at first. The round eyes and the large feet, naturally, disturb the æsthetic sense. One has to become accustomed to seeing them. The features are often delicately chiseled. And they have a quick responsiveness of eye that can be trying to a man of properly composed mind. They have as well a noticeable litheness of body. Wen says, indeed, that they dance with extraordinary grace . . . certain strange wild dances. I should not care to see them, unless it were merely as a matter of record, for my journal. A traveler should of course train himself to observe quite impersonally the odd customs of exotic peoples.

I wonder why she placed her lips against mine in that extraordinary manner. I dislike intensely that sort of thing. I will not permit it. . . . I shall speak to Wen to-morrow, reminding him that "At

home a young man should show the qualities of a son, abroad those of a younger brother. He should be circumspect but truthful. He should have charity in his heart for all men, but associate only with the virtuous. After thus regulating his conduct, his surplus energy should be devoted to literary culture."

Certainly the course of Wen's life now is far from the path indicated in that fine teaching. His associations are by no means limited to the virtuous. And the pursuit of learning appears to have been abandoned outright.

Would he take offense, I wonder, if I were to remind him of that other noble teaching: "Take note of the things that give a man pleasure; for how then can he hide from you what he really is"?

The night hours are passing. The inn is still, save for the stirrings of the animals within the area. For some reason I cannot sleep. My eyes are staring open, and my brain is rather uncomfortably alert and active. . . . What charms of person can a woman have that are unknown to us in China? I don't understand that. We know all about women.

I will not drink again with Wen Fui.

My thoughts dwell to-night on the quiet joys of friendship. I watch the moon sinking toward those dimly white mountains, and as I gaze my mood promises to crystallize in the form of a poem. It would be a poem on friendship. Hsu Shen comes to mind. My heart warms as I live again the evenings we have passed together at Lo Yang and Chang Ngan, walking in the shadow of the mountains or drifting in a boat among the lotus pads of Ch'ing Mu's exquisite garden or sipping fan spirits at the hospitable board of Ting Shao-i. Again the flavor touches my palate of the roast duck stuffed with young pine needles that graced our farewell dinner. . . . I must ask Wen how I may obtain some of that excellent wine. Or perhaps the innkeeper could tell me. Yes, that would be better; I will ask him.

I think I will call the poem "When I Gaze on the Majestic Peaks of the T'song Ling I Think of my Friend, Hsu Shen, because He, Like Myself, Loves Mountains."

My teacher is a brown-skinned man with remarkably delicate features, a native of some distant region to the southward. He tells me that the Yue Che conquered a portion of his country, nearly a century ago, and therefore he is familiar with their

language. He speaks of them with respect. Respect for a Hunnish tribe! It is all most perplexing to a well-ordered mind.

The Yue Che language is in sound and in root-meanings closely akin to the Wu Sun and the Hiong Nu. Like all these barbarian tongues it is polysyllabic, without tones, and thus can have none of the splendid color and sonority of the Chinese. I shall have small difficulty with the speech. But the written language is curiously different. It is expressed in a quaint running hand, based on an alphabet rather than on ideographs, the letters formed with an extraordinary number of straight lines terminating in loops and hooks and with many dots and other quaint markings. It is, my teacher informs me, virtually the Anhsi script. I note that he refers to Anhsi as Parthia. The land of the Yue Che he terms Bactriana, and their capital city (in our speech, Lanhse) Bactra, and sometimes Balkh. Ta Tsin he calls Rome. There are, indeed, so many strange-appearing words that I shall have to prepare a glossary, the first thing I know, to elucidate my own script.

It is nearly morning. The faintest imaginable tint of rose is touching the summits of the mountains. One full day I have lived in this city of the

frontier; and what a day it has been! My poor head throbs. As soon as the glory of the sunrise has passed, I will go to bed. It was fortunate that I instructed my teacher not to return before noon.

I have written another poem; the first effort not having worked out satisfactorily. This one is cast in the stop-short form. As I read it over, I find it not wholly lacking in the quality of surprise and thought-momentum desirable in this form. If after my sleep has refreshed my brain it still pleases me, I will copy it out and enclose it in a letter to Hsu. This is it:

TO MY FRIEND, HSU SHEN, LEXICOGRAPHER, OF LO YANG

A petal falls, and with it falls the spring!
The autumn brings no bloom, no birds, no green;
But then we drink and talk and play the sheng. . . .
Woman's the bloom, but friendship is the fruit.

[*The letter to Hsu, written within a few days of the above*]

FRIEND of my youth, across the vast barren spaces of the earth I salute you!

More have I to communicate than could ever be compressed within the limits of a letter. More strange things have I seen than can be told in our common language. I move among men with hair on their faces and women with round eyes and large feet and a certain wild beauty. Every day, as I walk about the streets of this queerly foreign city, I pass whole caravans of yaks, beasts of

burden as large as our water buffalo, but with coats of long rough hair. Camels I see daily that have but one hump. The first of these I assumed to be a deformity, but now I perceive that they form a distinct sub-species. They are lighter than our camels, and of less value in carrying weight, but can run with the speed of dogs. Certain warlike tribes, I am informed, employ them as cavalry, and are able to travel enormous distances over the desert regions at a high rate of speed. I have held in my own two hands a single egg that was nearly as large as my head; this is the product of a bird found beyond the mountains that is half again taller than a man.

The food is as strange as the rest of it. Mutton they have, of course, and chicken, but many unfamiliar vegetables. Fortunately I brought plenty of rice with me, and tea. Neither is native to this region. The nomadic tribes hereabouts make many uses of mare's milk, as do the Hiong Nu. One is a strongly fermented drink made of the soured milk, known as *kim iss*. It is more palatable than it will sound to you. And they have a curious custom of filling their saddle bags with curds and riding on them; the result being a mealy substance that will sustain whole armies for months without other food. And as their armies have great numbers of the mares always in their train they are capable of astonishing mobility.

You will be glad to learn that my reception at the Yamen was most flattering and that the promise of rapid advancement is held out to me. The good fortune which first gave me employment at Court, and which has since followed me through many unusual adventures, still follows me; and the local astrologers assure me that my life will continue dramatic in the extreme. I look forward eagerly to all that may take place, if with certain

misgivings at the thought of that round-eyed woman on which each of the astrologers dwells with considerable emphasis. I do not see how any woman can be of more than incidental importance in my life. And I can assure you that during all this long journeying I have indulged in no amorous dalliance.

Our old friend Wen Fui is here and in favor, and has already helped me considerably in familiarizing myself with local conditions. And the General Protector, Pan Ch'ao, has been more than kind. He at once set me studying certain of the native dialects, and I am assured that my work will be at the beginning not less important than serving as interpreter in certain important diplomatic matters. General Pan is a very great man. He has conquered and peaceably organized an empire vaster than is realized, I feel certain, in Lo Yang. Indeed, it will be a long time, possibly generations, before the magnitude of his service to the beneficent dynasty of Han can be fully understood and appreciated at home. Some day when there is leisure I will try to describe for you the almost unbelievable value of the silk export across the frontier mountains — that range known as the T'song Ling, which is higher, can you believe, and more rugged than any range in China! The T'song Ling, indeed, dominates every thought out here. Beyond it lies mystery — precisely what no man can yet say — new worlds, perhaps.

Yes, new worlds! I am advised that it is unwise to attempt conveying to the more settled minds of the homeland, the seat of the one fine and truly great civilization in all human history, how epochal General Pan's discoveries may prove to be. But you are a true scholar; your mind is open to all great truths. Yes, I dare undertake to tell you.

But you must give me your whole imagination. And prepare for a shock. . . . First, unroll your map of the earth (I have mine before me as I write) and prepare to study it thoughtfully.

You will note that the T'song Ling is indicated as stretching northward and southward not far from the western rim of the earth. Directly beyond it are two narrow strips, interlocking somewhat, marked rather vaguely, Yue Che and Anhsi; and just beyond these, the rim. Very well.

Now, dear friend, you must give the utmost consideration to what I am about to disclose. . . . I hesitate . . . but the thing has got to be said. . . . Dear Hsu, *the rim is not there!* The land of the Yue Che is not a narrow strip, but a considerable region. You could not traverse it, from east to west, in less than forty days. And beyond that the land of Anhsi (or Parthia, as they quaintly call it; the effort to translate these barbarous polysyllabic names into Chinese will be the death of me yet!) is an empire — yes, an empire! — so vast that all of eighty to one hundred days would be consumed in crossing it.

And this, still, is not all! Try to keep pace with me in your thoughts; though my own, I must admit, are reeling like those of a drunken man as I set down these bald words that are yet of such astounding significance. Beyond the Anhsi lies the greatest nation of them all, that Ta Tsin (or Rome) of which they speak so glibly out here, and that has no place whatever allotted to it on your map or mine!

Now, wild as these assertions may appear to you, they are truths known to all in authority here. And they are truths more vitally important to us of the Middle Kingdom than will be generally understood, it

may be, for centuries; more important than we, in our wildest imaginings, could have dreamed. For in this Ta Tsin resides a numerous people of some considerable, or at least comparative, civilization. *It is they who buy our silk!* The Yue Che, it appears, buy it from us through the familiar barter or exchange of commodities and resell it to those of Ta Tsin, at an enormous advance in price, for gold! . . . In that empire they actually stamp coins, and of an excellent design. General Pan, whose intelligence reaches to the very corners of the earth, has specimens of these coins in his possession. I have seen them and weighed them in my hand. I believe that he dreams of one day eliminating the reshipment from which the Yue Che derive their power and securing all this immense wealth directly for China. . . . Do you wonder that my head reels?

But I will tax your brain no further to-day. Certain other and lesser facts I am noting in my journal. Men of culture and earnest purpose, I find, exhibit a tendency to deteriorate somewhat on this frontier. Doubtless the absence of normal family life and of a background of settled public opinion make this inevitable. It is particularly saddening to observe so many of our better class taking up with these rather ungoverned native women. My own sense of responsibility, I am pleased to advise you, is deepening. I bear in mind constantly the words of our great Teacher:

"The man who can appreciate moral worth and disengage his mind from sensual passion; who can put forth his utmost strength in serving his parents and lay down his life to serve his prince; who speaks sincerely in his intercourse with friends; such a man has received the best and highest sort of education."

From the Journal
probably two or three weeks later

THE General Protector sent for me this afternoon, quite unexpectedly. Wen brought the message. He offered no personal comment. He and I regard each other with reserve these days.

His Excellency indicated a chair, and then went at once at the business in hand. He is a man of extraordinarily vigorous and direct mind. No long-nailed sybarite, he!

"You have been much about the Court in Lo Yang, Jan Po," he remarked, thoughtfully, uttering the words more as a statement of fact than a question.

I inclined my head.

"And you have had certain opportunities for observing the Prince Imperial with some intimacy."

I bowed again, and determined to express in my bearing as in my words that sincerity and honesty to which my life has ever been dedicated. I replied:

"It was my privilege and delight, Your Excellency, to be numbered among the teachers of the Prince Imperial over a period of many months."

"So I understood." He paused in his speech, and sat quietly, still regarding me. This great

soldier, who seems often blunt and even rough in manner when considered in comparison with the polished and somewhat (I fear) effeminate statesmen of the Imperial City, has as well the gift of complete repose. He will at times sit motionless, impassively studying the man before him, quite as you and I study our tiles at the gaming board. It is a part of his method of testing us, I believe.

"The Prince, according to my latest reports," he said, when he was ready to speak again, "is an extremely headlong young man."

I caught my breath. Even the being who will so soon become the beneficent ruler of the Middle Kingdom and the Empire is, it would appear, in the mind of this mighty guardian of the Northwest, but one more person in his tremendous political game!

I controlled my face, however, and after a moment, fearlessly following his lead, responded:

"I regret, Your Excellency, that such is the case."

"You found him inclined to neglect his studies?"

"Invariably, Your Excellency."

"Has he still a violent temper?"

I inclined my head.

"A pretty intense sort of youth? Wild, and impatient of the slightest restraint?"

I bowed.

"Bear in mind, Jan, that I have not been in Lo Yang for fifteen years. For all direct information I must rely on the observation of accurate minds like your own. Tell me in detail what you know of him. He is now nineteen years old."

"He is, Your Excellency. A grown man, indeed; tall and straight, a beautiful man."

"There are still no heirs?"

"Unfortunately, none, Your Excellency. Only the six daughters. Or perhaps there are seven now. Yes, I believe one of the Imperial Concubines gave birth to a daughter shortly before I came away."

"Hmm! Curious. And the Emperor his father — he is still alive?"

"He was alive, Your Excellency, at the New Year. But greatly weakened. It was said that he had been unable to recognize even the Regent for more than a year."

"Very good. Now tell me precisely what you know of the young man's mode of life. His tastes, I understand, are violent."

"Unfortunately, yes, Your Excellency. He delights in gaming and cock-fighting. He has sent envoys as far as the Southern Islands and Java in the search for blooded cockerels. He has made himself expert with the bow and arrow, and goes so far as to take part in public contests, under

the thinnest of disguises. I have known him even to appear publicly in plays, for his interest in the theater amounts to a passion. Of late he has amused himself, together with certain of the other Princes and of his chosen cronies, in making up as a beggar, in rags and filth, and sitting by the roadside in Lo Yang asking alms. He rides race-horses — though this fact is known, I believe, only to those of us who have been of his personal entourage — and once at least has actually taken part, under an assumed name, in a public wrestling bout."

"Hmm! Did he win?"

"He did, Excellency. I witnessed the affair."

"Indeed! . . . It is said also that he gives much time to loose women."

"I regret to say that it is so. Since the inauguration of the Imperial Harem, it has been the policy of the Regent to search the Middle Kingdom for maidens of a particularly modest and sober disposition, in the hope, I presume, of reaching the better side of his nature through his very weakness."

"But without observable success?"

"With no success, Excellency. Last autumn, only, when a report reached him that the maidens of the Southern Islands were of a freer and livelier nature than those of China, he demanded that a selection of these be made for the Harem. The

Regent very properly overruled him, only to apprehend him in the act of making preparation for a secret journey to that region."

"Hmm! Yes, I see. . . . And now another question. It is reported to me that an attempt was made by the Yue Che at about that time — certainly during the summer or autumn — to send envoys by way of the Southern Sea with presents and a verbal message for His Highness. You left Lo Yang, you say, at the time of the New Year. Did you hear of any such embassy?"

"I did not, Your Excellency."

"Very good. Thank you."

This extraordinary scene took place not an hour ago. My pulse still tingles as I realize to what degree I am in the confidence of His Excellency. Naturally, I hastened to set it down in my journal precisely as it occurred, word for word. So few of those out here are of a scholarly nature that my journal may well prove to be the only accurate record of the life on this frontier and the stirring events that are, I believe, certain to come.

I have decided to keep it under lock and key hereafter. A good plan would be to have a small cabinet made that I can conceal in my personal luggage. Yes, I will do that, employing a native

artisan rather than any of those about the Yamen. My secret thoughts must be kept inviolate. I could be beheaded, one day, for what I have recorded here as my own judgment of my Prince and future Emperor. I think I shall write a memorial directing that in the event of my death all my effects be delivered to my dearest friend, Hsu Shen, to be disposed of as he may think fit.

An entry of a fortnight later
(omitting certain gossip of the Yamen
and much discursive comment
on the Yue Che language)

His Excellency sent for me again to-day.

"Jan," he said, as quietly as if directing me to copy a document, "you are to leave in the morning for the city of Balkh, beyond the mountains. Take your personal servant and such food supplies as you may need. Pack-animals and a bale of presents for the Queen of the Yue Che will be sent to your lodging at dawn. You will bear the silver tablet of my government in order to establish yourself properly with the Wa zir or Prime Minister of that nation; but will have no diplomatic authority, as we admit no right on their part to such standing. This order" — he placed a parchment in my hand — "will be honored by the Treasurer in gold.

"You will announce yourself simply as my agent commissioned to investigate the reports that their horses are larger and fleeter than ours, with authority to purchase a number of stallions and brood mares in case the reports prove correct. Treat courteously and patiently with them. Bear in mind that certain of these remote peoples have little real understanding of the extent of our civilization or our military power. Bear in mind further that I am not minded to send an army over the mountains at this time, and do or say nothing to provoke hostility.

"So much for your ostensible mission. Your actual duty will be to fathom the motives that lead this persistent young Queen, or her Wa zir, whichever it may be, to make these attempts to reach the Throne of Han. Use every means within the scope of your ingenious brain to do this. Make friends, listen everywhere, say little. They will spy on you with the utmost adroitness. Be careful. If within three to five months you have been able to learn nothing conclusive, return and report to me. But make no effort to send written reports over the mountains. Good luck to you, and an interesting journey!"

That was all! Simply that! There is not time to

write more. I shall barely have time to visit an astrologer. There is one near the outer gate of the Yamen.

I am in great confusion of mind.

I shall carry my two lamps, and write down my experiences of the day during part of each evening. Excepting the hen-livered Kan Ying I am probably the first civilized being to penetrate the mysteries that lie beyond the barrier of the T'song Ling. It is important to the whole world that I record every incident of the journey. For what has Kan Ying left to enrich our knowledge?

At the village of Boxai Guinbaz,
in the Pa Mir, or T'song Ling

I AM extremely uncomfortable. This inn is but a wretched hovel in a small mountain village. The dirt and the vermin are distressing. I am weary after ten days of hard travel, and depressed at the thought of further adventuring into these primitive regions of the West. The altitude is so great that I breathe with difficulty. Ying is nearly prostrated, and serves me ill. The scenery is bleak in the extreme. Despite the summer season, there is snow everywhere that flies about in the gusty windstorms and makes travel difficult. Water boils at so low a temperature that my rice cannot be

properly cooked, and the tea cannot be drunk. Without well-brewed tea I am never myself.

By way of fire there is but a heap of small sticks and argols of dung which fill the room with smoke and set me coughing at short intervals. My eyes smart intolerably. I cannot give proper attention to my journal.

Beyond innumerable water fowl about the lakes and a species of sheep with magnificent horns I have seen nothing of interest. The shoes of my horse and my stirrup irons are made from these horns. Heaps of them, often still attached to the whitened skulls, lie scattered along the crude highway, giving a final touch of desolation to the scene. Only the silk trains, which one passes all day on the road, serve as reminders that there is, somewhere in the remote East, a vast and pleasant land called China.

The natives are of low origin and live in squalor. Is it possible that the Yue Che of the plain beyond the mountains will make no better impression on me?

Jauzgun. Two weeks later

To my amazement I have discovered that this fertile land of Badashan, into which I have been journeying for three days, is a kingdom with a

surprising degree of civilization that pays tribute to the Queen of Balkh, or Yue Che, which country lies ever farther and farther west. Still other kingdoms, of which no one has ever heard, lie between!

They build here with stone and plaster. It is a considerable city. The men wear furs. The women of the upper classes veil their faces and wear multiple trousers that bag widely about the hips. Broad hips are, indeed, regarded among them as the mark of beauty. They have large feet, as well. And none of them has the smallest notion how grotesque they are. They seem actually complacent. The children in the streets stare at my clothes as if they had never seen a gentleman before. But then, of course, they never have!

The fine rubies of which I heard much at So Kui are found in the mountains to the northward. And their horses are truly finer than any in China. But who will believe this when I tell it at home? Sportsmen here make use of white hawks which are very swift and sure in flight. They grow excellent grain and press oil from walnuts. It is a land of beautiful mountains and valleys with fine trees and much running water. Their language is not that of the Yue Che, and I find great difficulty in making myself understood. At the first opportunity I will write further regarding this country.

Tai Can
Another week has elapsed

I passed yesterday beyond the edge of the earth!

Balkh. The first evening

How am I to set down in any orderly manner the marvels I have beheld? I am bewildered to a point at which consecutive thought is extremely difficult.

For days upon days I have been traversing a plain in which villages and farms abound. Thousands of good stone houses have I seen, and great aqueducts which bring water down from the mountains and irrigate the fields much as our fields are irrigated at home. Unmistakably it is a civilization of great antiquity, reaching back for many centuries before the Yue Che conquest. There is a legend, indeed, that the Virgin Queen is descended from a daughter of the King of Samarcand by a remote and magnificent conqueror from the Far West named Alexander, who seems to have been Emperor, not of the Rome of which I heard at So Kui, but of an equally powerful empire known as Greece. I do not understand this at all. The innkeeper, a garrulous person, has talked almost constantly since my arrival this afternoon. He even had the effrontery to tell me — me, a mandarin of the Empire of Han — that Balkh is known, all over

what he complacently referred to as the civilized world, as "the mother of cities." . . . What will they say to that in Lo Yang?

But I am shaken profoundly. It is an amazing city, with great palaces built of the purest white marble and vast walls that are covered with tiles of an azure color and glazed so smoothly that the eyes are dazzled by the shining blue light. But though they have these fine tiles for the wall surfaces I have seen no roofing tiles whatsoever; indeed, they may be said to have no roofs, but merely flat tops of stone or plaster on houses and palaces alike. There are canals and paved streets and spacious public squares and great bazaars and prosperous inns. Beyond the walls that surround the homes of rich men I have caught glimpses of hanging gardens bright with flowers and foliage. And there are separate buildings set in other gardens that have small outer windows barred and grated with iron which could only be the harems. Camel trains wind constantly through the crowded streets, and hundreds of these tall slender horses with glistening coats and proud heads. The silk is everywhere. Bales of it are piled high in the inn-yard. This is the point at which it is taken from the mountain pack-trains and loaded again on camels for the long journey westward and across a vaguely mentioned

sea — still another sea! — to those Romans in whose existence I still find it hard to believe.

It is a city of colleges; even, apparently, of culture; and so cosmopolitan in character that my Chinese robes and my embroideries (the men here do not wear embroidered garments) attract only passing attention. I am, in truth, ignored.

The outer walls I estimate at sixty li in circumference, a full day's walk. They are built of earth and gravel, faced with granite, and surmounted by strong towers. The military, as I have seen them at the gates and about the city, are neatly if quaintly uniformed and have an air about them of assurance and a degree of training. I am struck by this fact.

Late this afternoon I wandered through a bazaar so vast that during a walk of a full hour I was never once out from under the continuous awnings. Dealers in every imaginable sort of merchandise call their wares from booths. There is a great noise of hammering on brass, of which metal they beat out, in quaint designs, trays and bowls and other table wares and ornaments. Thousands of rugs I saw, woven in the patterns which are becoming familiar to my eyes and which I even begin to like. The colors are rich and dark.

In the morning I am to make my appearance at

Court. I dispatched a message to the Wa zir, immediately on my arrival, and in his prompt and courteous reply he advised me that shortly after dawn I am to be installed in a private house, from which, before noon, lictors will escort me to the Palace of Her Majesty.

The following morning

THEY have moved me into a house near the northern wall of the city. It is walled away from the street, with many large rooms, the furniture and hangings very costly and pleasant. Above the flat roof is a square tower or pavilion furnished with divans, tables, and rugs, which is reached by walking from the covered stairway across the roof — or roofs, I should say, for the house is, in reality, made up of a number of connected buildings. There are servants, gate-keepers, cooks, and gardeners; for at the rear of the group of buildings there is a remarkably pleasant formal garden, in which water trickles down in silvery little waterfalls from a pavilion over a series of terraced flat stones. On either side of this watercourse stands a double row of very tall and slender trees of the poplar family, beneath which is a path and an occasional marble bench.

My escort, a courteous officer of the Palace Guard, delivered the keys to me with considerable

ceremony; and immediately after his departure I amused myself by inspecting the entire property. In a cellar beneath the kitchens I found many hundreds of bottles — glass bottles — of their exquisite wine, of which I shall partake most sparingly. It was pleasing, none the less, to find them, and to know that on occasions when the loneliness of my situation may become unbearable there will be means at hand to soften the rigor of my task and bring to mind memories of the homeland.

Particularly must I bear in mind that in thus surrounding me with every imaginable comfort (which is surely done for the purpose of impressing me with the magnificence and strength of their strange civilization), they have me completely at their mercy. The servants are all spies, surely. In fact, from their manner during the visit of the officer who had me so courteously in charge I am convinced that all of them are familiar with military discipline. I find myself somewhat oppressed by the recollection of General Pan's treatment of their envoys as recently as last autumn. They will not have forgotten the incident. And it is by no means reassuring to reflect that I have traveled a distance of fifty-one days' journey westward from the nearest Chinese soldier. But on the other hand, I must think firmly that the

Queen and the Wa zir most certainly are aware in some measure, at least, of the irresistible power of the Han. They will be cognizant of what has been done to the Hiong Nu and the Wu Sun. Was not their recent act in attempting to effect an alliance against us with the Wu Sun an admission of weakness? Have they not resumed sending tribute, as is proper to every one of the minor nations of the earth? And are they not, even now, whatever their motives may be, making surprising efforts to communicate directly with the Throne of Han?

While it is true that my sleep last night was greatly troubled, I do not think I shall be afraid. We know that the princely type of man is free from fear. Only the inferior type permits himself to be agitated.

Perhaps I should note at this point that I found another apartment immediately adjoining my own that is furnished with all imaginable luxury. It is entered through a private door in my corridor. The windows there are heavily barred, and give on the garden. Obviously it was designed for the women of the household; and therefore is of interest to me only as a curiosity.

Afternoon

EVERY possible moment must I devote to my journal. In no particular, now that I find myself

abruptly launched into a world of imposing and important events, dealing as if I were a prince with the great of other lands, shall I entrust details to mere memory. Each small happening will I conscientiously note down, seizing the first free moment.

The sun was high in the cloudless heavens when that same officer of the Guard called to escort me to the Palace. His speech is that modified form of the old Yue Che that is evidently the speech of the entire nation. I find that I understand all he says by listening with the closest attention and watching his lips; and given a few days of practice I shall find myself able to communicate freely enough. He brought for me one of their magnificent horses, a piebald proud creature with a coat like silk, and in full ceremonial robes, with my tasseled hat and gold button and the embroidered insignia on my breast, I rode forth at his side. Ying, on another fine beast, rode with his servant in the rear. I had never been mounted on so high a horse, or so spirited; and as he cavorted about the street I could not resist glancing down and thinking how far beneath me the stone pavement was and how very hard a surface.

We passed through sections of this great city that I did not see during my ramble yesterday. In

particular was I impressed with the splendid open plaza before the Royal Palace. It is all of a li in length and two thirds as much in width. We were forced to pick our way through and around an enormous crowd that had gathered to witness a game played by eight or ten horsemen wearing different colors who dashed about striking at a white ball with long-handled mallets and evidently attempting to drive it between fine marble goal posts at one end or the other of the field. I would have supposed that individuals in the crowd might have observed my satin robe with its exquisite embroidery and my little-worn ceremonial hat, but as a matter of fact I attracted no attention whatsoever. Instead all were almost savagely intent on the game, cheering furiously as the ball flew first one way and then the other. And I reflected then that if our wild young Prince Imperial were ever to see this game nothing would suit him but to mount one of these glorious horses and with a mallet in his hand dash after that elusive little ball. How he would gallop and whirl and charge! . . . It occurs to me that I might gain great personal advantage could I persuade General Pan to permit sending a troupe of these players, horses and all, through to Lo Yang.

The guards at the Palace gate received us with

honor. They have, by the way, no series of ceremonial gates such as are important architectural features of even our least important Yamen. We entered directly into a wide courtyard. But then I saw that the actual Palace enclosure is set within a series of strong walls each excellently devised for defensive strength. And enclosed by the innermost wall is a magnificent arrangement of buildings and gardens more extensive and beautiful than any I ever saw before, even though the tasteful arrangement of our Chinese gardens be lacking.

My escort pointed out the Royal Residence, the Pavilion of Forty Columns in which is the throne used on great occasions, and the spacious gardens and buildings of the Wa zir's household which is set off within a wall of its own and with still another vast palace and park for his harem. Then we entered one of the marble structures nearer at hand, and after a short wait in an anteroom were led by a servant (who appeared to me to be a eunuch) into a spacious hall, built all of a painted wood into which silver and gold were beaten in intricate designs; even the ceiling, indeed, was thus ornamented; and while the pattern must appear odd and quaint to cultivated eyes, the workmanship was excellent.

Secretaries and courtiers smilingly surrounded

us. We moved forward to a little group that sat about a heavy table of onyx inlaid with gold, and then the attendants withdrew.

I bowed deeply, though with a swift nervous recollection of my instructions, neither kneeling nor with so much as my hands touching the floor. For before me sat, unquestionably, the Virgin Queen. Behind her stood two eunuchs. And I saw with a none-too-observant glance that the man who stood at her right hand, a little way removed, was short and fat, with a beard dyed with henna and a fat, sensuously cruel face. He was smiling.

But my eyes were on the Queen. I am still deeply moved as I dwell on the unique nature of my experience. Here sat the young woman who rules over a considerable and in some measure (the thing must be admitted) civilized nation of which the truly civilized world has barely so much as heard. And here was I, the first Chinese ever presented at her Court; while, on her part, she had never before beheld in her life a gentleman of Han. It was — it is, in fact — a moment of no small importance. No one can dispute that it may even prove to have been an historical moment. It would be disingenuous in me to disguise the thrill I felt (and still soberly feel) as a sense of the significance of this meeting took form in my thoughts.

It was with something of a shock that I realized that her face was wholly unveiled. It is a face between the oval and the round. The forehead is low and broad, the straight nose extending downward as almost a continuation of it, with hardly any recession between the eyes. These, of course, are large and round, and are of an extraordinary, flashingly brown color. I have never seen such eyes in a woman's head — proud, restless, fiery. And the hint of an almost masculine capacity for passion in them is borne out by the full lips and the further fullness about the mouth, which, while not a heaviness, is yet sufficiently marked to suggest that the Wa zir, with all his intrigues and his eunuchs and guards, must find the young lady a handful, indeed. Unlike our Chinese ladies, she wore little or no paint on her face beyond heavily stenciled brows; and, do you know, unconventional as the statement may seem, I rather liked the simplicity of this effect.

In frame, though small, she has that same lithe, almost athletic appearance that I noted in the women of So Kui. Doubtless she dances and rides a horse and indulges in astonishingly free exercises. I wonder if it hasn't occurred to these Western peoples that in giving their women this taste of freedom they have inevitably paved the way to the

situation I find here — a petulant, ungoverned slip of a girl sitting over them as ruler!

Most particularly was I struck with her hair. It is ample and fine, and of a lustrous bluish black, bushing out freely about her head and downward to a point almost at the level of her pretty chin, where it is cut squarely off all round. And when she moves her head the hair bobs about most engagingly. She wore about her forehead a golden band inlaid with quaintly foreign designs in some other metal. Her necklace was of golden concentric rings that lay on her shoulders, five or six of these, the lowermost supporting as many as fifty or sixty oval pearls, perfectly matched as to size, that lay against her embroidered vest.

As she did not rise from the table, I had no opportunity to observe the lower part of her costume, but imagine that it consisted of the usual full trousers and the padded, pointed shoes. Under her restless hand, on the table, lay stretched out the largest and most beautiful domestic cat I have ever seen, with long hair, black and white in color, that fluffed out on every side.

It gave me an odd sense of self-consciousness to feel (as well as see) those roving brown eyes, bold eyes, taking in curiously every detail of my features and my dress. She said nothing at first;

merely inclining her head rather curtly in response to my respectful but dignified bow.

I addressed her then, very simply presenting the greetings of General Pan Ch'ao, and expressing the wish that I might derive benefit from observation and purchase of the horses and other features in which their nation excelled ours. And I exhibited to them, not without pride, the silver tablet of General Pan.

And then Ying, who was frightened nearly to death, came forward with the presents.

It occurred to me then, most uncomfortably, that these would prove disappointing to Queen Roxana. Here before me sat no shrewd and experienced ruler, but a spoiled child wanting to be pleased. Even if General Pan knows — which I cannot say — anything of the actual magnificence of the Court, he would certainly send no gifts so valuable that they might be interpreted as tribute. No such little misunderstanding as that had place in his plans. And sure enough, while a few attractive jewels appeared as the bale was opened before her, and a mandarin coat of fine workmanship, I could see the look of girlish expectancy fade from her countenance.

But then the situation took a turn I could not have foreseen. The Queen, who had been stroking

the cat in her restlessly quick way, abruptly lifted her hand and gave a command. The cat rolled over. At another command he sat up like a trained dog. She laughed aloud then, in an odd brief way, and looked straight at me . . . impudently, I would say, were she a Chinese girl.

"His name is Darius," she said, not impulsively, but in the manner of one determined to be agreeable at whatever cost. And again her eyes swept my person. Her voice was pleasant in quality, a rather low-pitched voice of a dark timbre. She continued: "He has other tricks. I taught him myself."

At this point the Wa zir stepped forward and suavely and formally welcomed me to Balkh, expressing the courteous wish that my quarters were comfortable and my first impression of their poor country not unpleasant.

His person is repulsive to me. His head is round as a ball, the forehead low, the nose curving out and down, and the wide thick lips visible through that hideously dyed beard. His name is Ibn Shu Ber Din. His father was a slave from some western tribe. My escort smiles rather discreetly about him, but respects plainly enough the man's shrewdness and power.

I will note that the golden headband and the

really priceless necklace worn by the Queen are not native, but came from a far-away kingdom called Egypt that pays tribute to the Roman Empire. Egypt, too, is, or has been recently, ruled by a queen. The captain speaks of some curious legend or other concerning her. These gifts were brought quite recently by the Roman envoys who, it appears, are even now in the city. I must find a way to make inquiries regarding them.

I was about to . . .

There are voices in the courtyard.

Early evening

The princely man, says Confucius, never even for a moment quits the path of virtue. In times of stress and confusion he remains as firmly in that path as when decisions are easy.

Difficult as is the present situation, bewildered as I am, nevertheless I believe I have decided wisely.

The voices in the courtyard were, of course, those of the lictors bearing presents.

These they brought in on trays. There were bottles of wine from the Queen's own cellars and a platter heaped with the deliciously sweet strips of dried melon that I had already discovered to be a delicacy of the region. There were also boxes of sweets, and a ring for the thumb with a dried-up

green beetle set in the gold. I was informed further that the splendid horse I had ridden had been installed in my stable as a personal gift from the Wa zir.

And then, at a word from the chief lictor, two eunuchs came in escorting between them a female slave, with veiled face and clad in those absurd trousers. The slave, also, said the lictor, was the gift of His Excellency, a young virgin of his harem, whom he offered in hope that she might while away hours which would perhaps otherwise hang heavily on my hands. With this creature was also a maidservant, whose face was not veiled.

Then lictors and eunuchs withdrew.

The slave stood, with slightly bowed head, gazing out under heavily penciled eyebrows.

My first thought, naturally, was to pack her off about her business. I saw that Ying, by the door, was struggling with a desire to smile, and gave him an indignant look. Fortunately, in a moment I realized that to decline the gift would amount to an insult directed at the Wa zir. General Pan had instructed me to deal tactfully with these strange people. I must at least appear to conform to local customs.

To the slave I addressed myself, asking, with dignity:

"What is your name, child?"

In a few words she replied:

"Here, O my Master, I am known as Mosulla."

It seemed to me then that I should say more, but found no words ready on my tongue. She stood motionless, closely regarding me.

It became clear to me on the instant, as I noted the expression on Ying's face, that he was not to be trusted near these females; and accordingly I packed him from the room with instructions to have luncheon served shortly. Then I led the way into the corridor and unlocked the door leading to the women's quarters.

I will admit that I was wholly at a loss what course to pursue. The girl was my property, a gift. She accepted the situation, apparently, as a matter of course.

She passed through the door, followed by the maidservant, and then paused, as if awaiting further instructions. I hesitated. And then the thought came to me — a sound thought, I believe — that if she were the Wa zir's spy, she might as well, in some degree, at least, serve me in the same capacity.

Accordingly, I asked:

"You have had food?"

"No, O my Master!"

"Then return when you have prepared yourself and eat at my table."

"I hear and obey," she murmured. I closed the door upon her, but she did not lock it.

The food was ready on the table when she reappeared. Gone were the veil and the heavy street garments. She is not unlike the Queen, but lighter of build and somewhat daintier of feature. Her hair is not cut off in that quaint way, but lies coiled about her head. Her skin is of a dark velvety texture. She wore a simple necklace of bangles about a bare and prettily modeled neck. She moves with extraordinary freedom and grace; though at first she merely slipped within the doorway and fixed those brown eyes on my face. Realizing that she might be afraid, I spoke pleasantly, indicating the bench on the other side of my table, hoping thus to put her at her ease. She moved slowly over to it, and after another timid glance at me, seated herself and let her hands fall across her lap.

She was born in a remote city called Mosul, and as a child was captured by the Parthians, by whom she was sold or given, with her mother and a sister, to the Wa zir of the Yue Che. More than a year ago she was chosen for the harem, and has since been undergoing instruction and training to fit her

for the position of a consort to His Excellency. She knows the Romans and remembers that they came often to Mosul in splendid armies and with mighty engines of war.

She is extremely pretty. I did not perceive how pretty, until, after she had sipped a glass of the Queen's wine and, realizing that I meant to be kind to her and gradually losing her timidity, she began talking freely. She even giggled, as girls will, at my not altogether appropriate attempts at humor. This was after Ying had removed the plates. She has remarkably graceful hands and arms which she moves lightly about as she talks. She even, after a few hours had passed in conversation, informed me that there is great excitement at the Palace over my arrival and many surmises as to the significance of it.

Wishing to divert her mind from my affairs, and naturally mistrusting her motives, I asked about the training for His Excellency's harem. She mentioned dancing as a spectacle of which he was particularly fond in his leisure hours.

"You yourself are a dancer, perhaps," I ventured.

"Oh, yes!"

"I should be glad to witness the dancing of this country."

"My Master wishes me to dance?" she cried, and in a moment, after a graceful and profound bow, was gone.

It really hadn't occurred to me that she would perform then and there. But as I reflected, considering the delicate and perhaps dangerous situation in which I found myself, it seemed to me that no harm would be done. Anything relating to the customs of this country is properly of interest to me. And after all, since she had been thus thrust upon me, wasn't it my duty to adapt myself with at least outward ease to the circumstances as they might arise. Thus I reflected at the time.

I heard a subdued tinkling sound, and the maid-servant appeared with cymbals on her hands, and announced that her mistress was prepared for the dance. She waited then for me to precede her into the women's quarters.

When I had done so, and had settled myself comfortably enough (I think I successfully concealed my inner excitement), the servant sank cross-legged to the floor by the wall and began beating the cymbals together softly and rhythmically. The soft afternoon light fell pleasantly within the room.

Mosulla then glided slowly into the room, and I found myself closing my eyes. But in a moment

I reopened them. Why not? I was there by right. No one could question me. Everything about the situation was proper. My confusion, I think, derived from my complete unfamiliarity with the sort of thing. As for Mosulla, though it seemed to me that when our eyes first met, during a brief moment, she colored, quite as confused as I — certainly she lowered her eyes — there was reason for self-consciousness neither in the occasion nor, for that matter, in her costume. Undoubtedly, however this latter might have appeared to cultivated Eastern eyes, it was the traditional and locally proper costume for the dance. Possibly, however — indeed, certainly — it was the first time she had thus appeared in the presence of a man, let alone a man to whom she had within the day, for better or worse, been handed as an outright gift, and the moment of girlish confusion could easily be explained on this ground alone.

The costume, in fact, consisted of a silver headdress from which bangles and coins swung and jingled; breastplates of chased silver secured by chains of the same metal; a belt from which was suspended a transparent skirt of the most lustrous silk, and jingling silver anklets. Even the pretty feet were bare. (I must admit that the natural feet of women no longer appear large to me.) She was

as slim as a boy. I closed my eyes, and during a brief moment bent my thoughts on the tradition of the princely man.

"You must not dance now," I said then, firmly. But her face fell so quickly — she seemed wholly the child — that I hastened to add, "However, I will brew you some tea."

"Is that the wine of your country?"

"In a sense, yes. But first, my child, you must resume your clothing."

"You do not like me so?"

"Very much. But the sun is sinking low, and I would not have you take cold. You are mine" — I didn't mean to put it in just that way; I thought her face lighted somewhat — "I mean to say, you have been placed under my protection, and I must keep that lovely body well. Hurry, now! I will prepare the tea while you are dressing, and will myself serve you."

She moved slowly and doubtfully from the room. The servant, I noted, had already slipped away. I confess I welcomed a few minutes of solitude in which to compose my thoughts. It is evident to me now that I hardly knew what I was saying to her. She must have thought me severe. It is her business to please me, and she wishes not to fail at that. . . . I shall dine alone to-night. That

is the wiser course. It would have been better not to weaken in the matter of the tea. But I can hardly escape that now. And even so, it is little more than a dignified rebuke. I shall be quite matter-of-fact with her, conversing only on general and impersonal topics.

And I shall dine alone.

Near morning

My window hangs out over the garden. I hear the tinkling sound of the little waterfalls. The scent of roses floats upward to my nostrils. Through the paling night the poplars loom softly and behind them the eastern sky is opalescent.

Sleep has been out of the question. I tremble yet with excitement, but cannot divine if this bewilderment be happiness. How can it be? Do we not know from the lips of the Master that happiness lies in learning and in practicing on occasion what one has learned?

The danger of my situation has not before been so clear to me. It weighs on my spirit. We killed their envoys; why should they not kill ours? I can lean only on the power and majesty of the Han. But our nearest soldier is fifty marches away. For that matter I have not an envoy's standing.

If I am to retain in any measure the composure

of mind in which the princely man must dwell, it will be through this gift of literary expression. If writing be dangerous, what thing can I do that would be safe? Mosulla, like the servants, is surely a spy. There is some reassurance in the thought that not one pair of eyes this side of the T'song Ling can read what I write. For I dwell beyond the rim of the earth. I have known terror this night.

Most puzzling of all is her religion. It is difficult, indeed, to imagine what a female slave of the barbarous West can have to do with such matters, yet a religion, albeit of a strange sort, she has.

For example, after we had drunk the tea, I was about to throw out of the window the hot water that was left in the kettle (they make these implements prettily of bronze) when she caught my arm. Obviously she shouldn't have done that; but I perceive now that she was stirred by fear. When I asked what was the matter she explained that to throw hot water on the ground would scald the faces of the little devils. She would say no more about it. I should also record the fact that the peacock symbol that appears repeatedly in the embroidery of her clothing is intended in some way as a representation of her god; though in all these

matters she is reticent. Her tribe is known, she says, as the Dasne.

The trouble in which I find myself now is due to weakness on my part. The thought is disturbing; yet it is the truth. After tea I left her, adhering to my resolution to dine alone. She seemed, at that time, in a reasonable mood. But as I sat over my solitary meal excitement crept into my thoughts, even as it does now. I could see in imagination the light in her brown eyes, the sensitive movements of her mouth, the shadow of her lashes on her cheek. I instructed Ying to see that she dined well, but he returned with the report that she would not eat.

Naturally, this puzzled me. Dismissing Ying, I went to the door of the women's apartment and tapped. Hearing no reply, I entered and softly closed the door behind me. No lamp was burning, and a moment passed before I saw her in a heap under the window, her chin at the sill, gazing out into the shadows of the garden. I spoke her name.

She rose quickly then, and bowed before me. I lighted one of the lamps with a coal from the brazier, and offered her a seat on a divan. Her soft little face was wet with tears. I did not know what course to take. I had hurt her. But then, was not woman ever thus, quick to play upon the feelings of her master until she finds his weakest point?

And has it not been said by Confucius: "Girls and servants are the most difficult persons to handle. If you treat them familiarly they become disrespectful; if you hold them at a distance they resent it"?

It is, indeed, difficult now to reconstruct the scene that followed, relating the various incidents in the order in which they took place. And yet, if I cannot compel myself to face frankly what events may arise in the course of my own life, what hope have I of attaining any true reasonableness of thought? And if I cannot live as a rational being, what is to become of me? Who will do me honor? What man child will revere my memory?

I recall taking her hands in mine. They were remarkably small and firm and warm, the skin smooth as damask; and the fingers like lost children twisted gropingly among my own. At once I became aware of this new and alarming weakness with which I have now evidently to contend. I desired to draw her exquisite little body within my arms. It was, of course, wholly within my right to do so. If she had been merely the familiar sort of docile woman, or even a girl of the flower boats, I should have felt no hesitation in indulging my mood. But in a curious degree she seemed then — as more intensely now — to set up a claim on me.

It is as if she were reaching for my spirit. I do not really know how this is, or what it is in her that at once draws me to her and at the same time alarms me. I have never known a woman with such powers of fascination. She is beautiful. She seems as open and simple as a child, yet she is, I know, trained in the arts of love to a degree not understood in China and not encouraged there. . . . It seems almost absurd to waste so much thought on a slave whom I shall know but for a short period. For I couldn't consider taking her with me when I return to So Kui. I don't know what can have come over me.

But to resume my narrative. . . . I must have placed my arm about her, for she had buried her face in my sleeve, and was weeping there. Her body quivered with sobs. I hardly knew what to say or do. I remember stroking her hair and looking up at the remarkably fine stonework of the window. When the fit of weeping had passed, I asked her in a gentle tone what was the matter. She replied, not yet fully able to control her voice, that I didn't like her.

It was a relief, of course, to learn that the trouble lay no deeper. I patted her head, and concealing as best I could the nervous excitement that was stirring within my breast — an emotion complicated,

doubtless, by the fact that I held the creature in my arms as we talked — told her that she was charming.

Not the least puzzling aspect of this Western temperament — at least on the female side of the race — appears to be an extraordinary volatility of mood. I had hardly spoken these words before she lifted her head and was intently studying my face.

"You do wish me to dance?" she murmured.

I assured her, greatly confused, that I did. Whereupon she sprang to her feet and ran from the room. I had not intended thus to encourage her, but the words fairly formed themselves upon my lips. The fact appears to be that I couldn't bring myself to rebuff her again. Irresolute, I called after her that I did not wish the maidservant to appear. She seemed to seize on that as a partial explanation of what she regarded as my coldness, and turned to smile before she disappeared. And I sat alone on the divan, staring into the flickering shadows of the spacious room. I was debating whether to slip quietly back to my own quarters when she returned, clad again in the silken gauze and the tinkling ornaments.

It was difficult to perceive how I could leave at this point without giving rise to new moods and

new difficulties. It is an old saying that there is a tyranny in woman's tears. Besides, I did not wish to go. That is the truth.

She moved beautifully into the dance. I was able to consider the skill she displayed. Within the silken surface of her skin are muscles of iron and wire. She can poise on a toe, and can whirl an uncountable number of times without dizziness. Each muscle of the arms and shoulders and body seems under independent control. And all this amazing movement is tied in a rhythm as flowing and yet as inexorable as that of the Emperor Lui Heng's poetry. It is, indeed, this dancing, a form of poetical expression. I know now that she so regards it; as a fine art, to be approached in a spirit of reverence and to be performed with a proud heart. Indeed, slave though she be, she moved with the freedom and delight of a princess, laughing happily at me as she whirled about, indulging whole-heartedly, altogether childlike, in something not unlike the ecstasy of creative fire. I did, for the time, forget that ecstasy is more primitive than rigid self-control, vastly less difficult and less beautiful. My spirit was captivated; and feeling that, she laughed. It was impudent of her; yet I too laughed. I realize it now. And when she finally sank, exhausted, at my feet, with a timid

questioning smile in her great round eyes, I drew her, with a wildness of spirit not less than her own, into my arms, and we laughed together.

Late in the evening she sent for bread, and gravely broke it between us. Then we both ate. From her solemnity at this point I could not dismiss the thought that she regarded it as in the nature of a marriage ceremony. And she a slave! Naturally, I was silent. Indeed, so great was my own excitement and so tender my attitude toward her that I could not choose to seem unkind. She is, indeed, a child.

I am glad Wen Fui is not here. He must never know.

A poem is forming magically in my brain.

SITTING AT MY WINDOW IN BALKH

During seven months I traveled westward,
Leaving my home and my friend Hsu Shen
With whom I roamed often under flowering trees
And talked happily of Ch'u Yuan and Sung Yu.
Beyond the world in a magical city of blue tiles
A girl has danced before me and let down her hair;
I am drunk with delight. But why does my heart ache
As I sit in my window at dawn and think about Hsu Shen?

Selections from the journal
covering a period of several weeks

WE are almost constantly together. When I have to go out, she clings to me, and I always find her

anxiously awaiting my return. Often she looks as if she had been weeping. I cannot fathom this. Her face responds so sensitively to my least mood that at times I find myself assuming a cheerful manner, though I am not sure she does not fathom every small pretense. She never meditates, but is continually burning with an inner fire that is, I must admit, like fan spirits to my brain. Indeed, I seem always to myself a little drunk, though not with liquor. What it all will come to I can't imagine. I am caught in a drift that I cannot stem. She must be near me every moment, if it be only to caress my sleeve as I write. I dare not read the classics now, for they would on every page accuse me. I have quite lost my head. This is the truth.

Sometimes at night we sit on the roof and gaze out over the moonlit city. On other evenings she veils herself and we walk abroad. There are hours during which we are silent, dead of brain, with all the world between us. We even quarrel. Then almost fiercely we caress each other. And then, very close in spirit, very calm toward all the world, we talk intimately of this and that. She tells me many stories of the Queen. It appears that for a time, earlier in the year, she was transferred to the Royal Apartments and served there as a personal attendant on Her Majesty. Queen Roxana appears

in these narratives as a young person of considerable color. She had for a time a lion cub of which she made a great pet. Naturally, as the creature grew older there was some concern lest it should harm the Royal person. The Wa zir's representations on this subject had, however, not the slightest effect on the headstrong girl. Even after the cub attacked and partly devoured one of the slave girls Roxana continued to feed and fondle it. Finally the Wa zir had it removed by soldiers and killed; an incident that for a time brought about a strained relationship.

In other respects Roxana proves herself a young person extremely adventurous and difficult to control. She rides well, and is given to hunting in the Royal Park. As the eunuchs are not active creatures, it has been no simple matter to find trustworthy officers and courtiers for this business. On one occasion the girl made secret overtures to one of these, even perfecting a plan by which he could gain access to her apartment. The young officer, who was a man of honor, promptly made the facts known to the Wa zir and requested an assignment to some distant frontier. It was thought better, however, to kill him. Nothing of this was mentioned to the Queen, nor did she speak of it. But she continued her impulsive and often naïve efforts

to gain a degree of personal freedom. She is very fond of the dance, and during several weeks employed my Mosulla as a teacher. Mosulla, indeed, declares that Her Majesty is gifted in the extreme and already would astonish the most sophisticated courts were it conceivable that she might appear before them. In particular is she skillful in the manipulating of silken veils and draperies, a detail of which they make much, I find, in their dancing.

In this connection it is interesting to note that Mosulla herself is not without fame as a performer. Through many little admissions I have pieced this fact together. She has worked arduously at developing her muscles and perfecting her technique. Often she dances for me, sometimes with the elaborate draperies in which the Queen delights, unveiling herself little by little as she poses and whirls until her exquisite charms are gradually revealed to me. And when I cry out in wonder at her magic, she tells me, all breathless, that were I once to witness the Queen dancing I should utterly forget her obscure little self. At that point I always laugh and take her into my arms and we are happy together.

Sometimes she tells me artless stories of the Wa zir, Ibn Shu Ber Din. Evidently he is a monstrous sort of person. Always suave in manner, he

sets innumerable intrigues in operation, never revealing to one underling what is known to another, often pitting one against the other, turning every petty jealousy and ambition of the Court in one way or another toward his own ends. No man has his confidence. No man has, indeed, more than his ear. His brain works so shrewdly and quickly that he is reputed — this in whispers — to have sprung from a hated race known as Semites. For this race appears to be known for a certain sharpness and quickness of mind, and is widely feared, therefore, among the simpler folk of other peoples. He is as gross and sensual as he looks. Upwards of six hundred girls are in his harem, and eunuchs are constantly at work everywhere about the kingdom selecting others. He is fastidious in his choice of concubines, regarding himself, indeed, as the final arbiter of taste in girls and horses. But all the women of the harem live in terror of him. He resorts to torture on the least provocation or on none, being weary of all normal human pleasures and seeking gratification of his senses through ever new devices. He is, in fact, as he appears to be, a man utterly depraved and cynical, cruel in the extreme, devoid of virtue. It is a strange fact that just such men rise everywhere to the highest station. Mosulla says that he is ambitious to

govern all the Western world; or, as she puts it, all the world. She has a keen eye, and, on occasions, a shrewd little tongue. Very little, I find, has escaped her observation. She believes that he is bent on using the Virgin Queen in his projects of gambling with empires. In this, of course, he is far from stupid. For Roxana is an extremely desirable young woman, and would bring a dowry no king could ignore. All said and done, Ibn Shu Ber Din is a personage to be reckoned with in the West. The man does not live who can divine his thoughts.

I note with interest that these Yue Che are quite as fond of theatrical entertainment as my own people. Ibn Shu Ber in particular loves to give elaborate performances for the entertainment of visiting envoys in which hundreds of beautiful maidens sing and dance and otherwise display themselves. He is shameless in this sort of pleasure-seeking, even going so far as himself to instruct the females in their diverting arts. His hair is black and curls tightly about his head; and he walks in a shuffling manner with his feet turned out widely.

It is a somewhat disturbing thought that he has not troubled to entertain me in any such lavish manner as noted above. But then, I have no official standing. I am met at every point with the

greatest courtesy, but nothing more. The two Roman envoys are plainly in his confidence, and feel none of the personal insecurity that so often troubles my sleep at night. They occupy, with a great suite, a palace adjoining that of the Wa zir.

Often we talk of Rome. Mosulla says it is the greatest of empires — I never check her when she chatters in this amusing way, but let her run on — with an enormous population, all educated and of upright and peaceable character. There are countless great cities, the capital being the greatest in the world. Excellent roads lead everywhere, with horse-posts to make travel swift and easy. Foreign ambassadors are invariably provided for and conveyed in splendid state. Gold and gems abound, among which are tablets that shine in the dark and pearls that are generated from the saliva of golden pheasants. They have beautiful ornaments of tortoise-shell — she has a shell comb that was her mother's — and corals and amber and many rare perfumes, a sort of cloth that will not burn in fire, but is cleansed by it, the most delicious foods in the world, and they have wonderful jugglers and conjurers, and a kind of lamb that grows out of the ground; the navel is attached to the soil by a cord through which it draws sustenance until it is

grown. Their houses are all of stone; their palaces are beyond description. Their armies could and perhaps will overrun the world. Over one of the gates of Rome city is a clock showing the twelve hours of the day (for so they reckon time in that country) by means of the golden figure of a man who drops a golden ball at every hour. Another gate is covered with gold leaf. They bring water enormous distances in pipes, and discharge it over the flat roofs in hot weather.

So Mosulla rattles on. And I do so enjoy the music of her voice that I listen as if I believed. For that matter, after all the wonders my eyes have beheld in this astonishing region beyond the T'song Ling, why may not some portion of the story be true? She has often, as a child, heard her father and her uncles discuss these matters. And as I have already noted, she has herself seen the Roman armies.

But she appears to know little concerning the Roman envoys. I see them sometimes near His Excellency, or at the games, or riding in their litters. And I meet their servants in my wanderings through the bazaars. They even have a few soldiers with them, splendid fellows with curly hair and hard-bitten faces and bare calves. Their spears are long and well made; their shields are

inlaid beautifully with other metals; and they wear short two-edged swords. All wear strange clothing; though to even that is my swiftly changing spirit becoming used.

What is to become of me?

I wonder.

The Queen has a bronze cabinet full of potent and little-known poisons, the key of which she wears always on her person. Some are powders of various colors contained in jeweled boxes. Others are liquids in small bottles of glass. This cabinet, Mosulla believes, has for generations been the personal property of the kings and queens of Balkh. Mosulla herself has seen it. Certain of the poisons act instantly, others slowly. After the incident of her frustrated passion for the young officer, regarding which I have already made a note, it was feared about the Palace that she might be tempted to make use of one of the poisons, but her adventurous love of living evidently prevailed.

In so many ways the headlong young Roxana is like our own Prince Imperial that I often dwell on the comparison. Mosulla loves to make me tell of the Prince. Often I describe him — how he is young and straight and tall; how he wrestles and

rides and seeks adventure and draws the stoutest of bows. She asks, too, about the women of the Southern Islands whither he so nearly fled last year. I think she tries to find out how much I know of them and whether I really have not seen them. She asks me if it is true that our Chinese women are passive and lacking in spirit, and shudders at the thought of foot-binding and household servitude. She, a slave, shudders at that, as at the precepts of the Master! I hardly know what to make of her. At the proper moment I shall endeavor to lead her into telling me why Queen Roxana has tried so curiously to reach our Prince.

If Mosulla is a spy, she shall serve me perhaps better than she serves Ibn Shu Ber Din. We shall yet see about all this.

But I tell her, and it is the truth, that in all my life in China as in the North I have known no woman so lovely and spirited as her small self. And then she whirls about and dances and runs to me for a caress.

I have had my personal belongings moved into the women's apartment. I could not very well bring Mosulla and her servant into my own rooms, to which Ying and the other servants have free access, and Mosulla cannot bear to have me away

from her side. Often at night she wakens me by touching my shoulder or my face to make sure that I have not left her. After that she will sleep soundly, like a little girl, whilst I lie long awake thinking of my predicament. At dawn this morning I observed her in her slumber breathing deeply like a healthy young animal. As I watched, she smiled and muttered broken phrases and then drew close and put her arm around my neck; and without waking her I kissed her hair. The scent she uses, an oil extracted from the beautiful roses of this region, was like a drug in my nostrils. It was hard then to think of the parting that must come.

She likes to study the embroidery on my sleeves. I have to relate the history of each symbol. She laughs merrily over the trees and houses that seem to be placed in the air above other trees and houses, and over the people that walk, she says, on the heads of the other people.

Last night, after the curtains were drawn and the great city had ceased its busy murmuring and settled into sleep, we lay close and talked intimately as she often loves to do.

She said: "My Master is a rich man?"

I had to tell her the truth. "No, I am only a scholar and a poet, of modest rank. With good fortune I may one day have possessions and even fame. But that lies in the future."

That this confession so evidently made no difference to her was moving to me. She held me the closer and laughed in her soft and pretty way.

"My Master will write a poem about his little Mosulla?"

"I have done so," said I. "How could I help it?"

"Oh! That is very nice. Say it to me."

Accordingly I repeated the verses to which I have given the title, "Sitting at My Window in Balkh." She listened intently. It seemed to me, as I recited the poem — however stumblingly, since it was necessary to translate as I spoke from the sonorous word-sounds and tones of the Chinese into her more meager language — that it reflected with some skill the exquisite melancholy of love. I repeated the final verses, expressing them, I believe, more accurately the second time.

I am drunk with delight. But why does my heart ache
As I sit in my window at dawn and think about Hsu Shen?

She did not speak, but lay very still. It seemed to me then that something of the music of the lines must have touched her despite my inadequate

translation. And I was moved to find words in the Yue Che in which might be recited the stop-short poem I wrote during that lovely night at So Kui. I did at length recite it.

A petal falls, and with it falls the spring!
The autumn brings no bloom, no birds, no green;
But then we drink and talk and play the sheng . . .
Woman's the bloom, but friendship is the fruit.

Still she did not speak. I truly wondered that my simple verses could have moved her so deeply. I sought her hand; and for a time, with her fingers twisted among mine, we lay quiet. Then she said, in a subdued dark voice: "I do not think I understand your poetry very well."

I hardly knew how to reply to this. It seemed not altogether reasonable of her to resent the subject-matter of the poems; though even then, I admit, it occurred to me that she might so take them. For it must be granted that, while in many departments of worldly experience she is wise and practical beyond her years, still it would be somewhat inaccurate to describe her as a wholly rational being. Her life, her traditions, her very blood stand in the way. Even her religion, I am beginning to perceive, is saturated with the superstition and the supernatural leanings against which Confucius has so properly warned us.

She said, rather abruptly: "It is time to go to sleep now. Good-night, O my Master!" And after briefly kissing me she turned on her side; turned away from me. Naturally, I was troubled.

I awoke at some late hour of the night, and found her place beside me vacant. It was not even warm. Realizing that she must have been away for some time, I was alarmed. As I reflect now on my state of mind at that moment I cannot but ask if I am becoming as eager and warmly clinging as she. Very likely. It is certain that life is moulding me, profoundly changing me. I am more than ever frightened when I try to think of all it may mean. But of what good is thinking at such a time? A man might as well try to think during a battle.

Then I realized that a lamp was burning in the adjoining room, and springing up went in there. She sat cross-legged on the divan, wrapped in one of my embroidered coats. On a table beside her were writing materials.

It is interesting to note in this connection that they do not write with a brush, as we do, but with the quill of a goose, the large end of which is whittled to a point and slit with a knife. With it, odd to say, they are able to form their letters quite neatly if with nothing resembling the skill of our fine calligraphy.

"What are you doing?" I cried, in great relief. "I missed you, and was frightened."

At this she smiled faintly, and then lifted the sheet of lambskin on which she had been writing.

"I have composed a poem in the manner of my people," she said, studying me, with dark mystery in her eyes.

I took the parchment. A moment elapsed before my heavy eyes could focus on the writing. Confronted by her somber gaze I felt uncomfortable. But the thought arose quickly and properly that she must not become aware of any inadequacy in me. Accordingly I read:

This is my beloved and my lord, O daughters of Iskandar!
His stature is as the date tree; his hair is black as the wings of a raven; his head is as the heads of great kings.
His eyes are of almonds and beryl and milk; his eyes are soft as the eyes of the pigeons that bathe at the Queen's pool.
His cheeks are a garden of sweet spice; his temples are petals of the moss rose; the smell of his nose is like the grapes of Merv; his lips are ripe apricots and pomegranates, and the roof of his mouth is sweet wine.
His legs are twin columns of the marble of Paros; his belly is a field of wheat in the sun; his breasts are the bulwarks of a mighty city; his neck is a strong tower of old ivory; his frown is terrible as the chariots of Cyrus. I flee from my beloved and cover myself with his garments and shiver with the cold that is in my heart.
I will tell the nightingale that my beloved has turned from me and sighs for the friends of his youth, and the nightingale will whisper at the ear of his heart while he sleeps. Tell him, O

nightingale, that I am his garden, that I am his, and live only in his smile. Then shall he come into his garden and feed on the apricots and grapes there and gather the wild tulips of my heart.

Naturally, I could not at the moment criticize her poetry. I am not even sure that she wished me to do so. My eyes filled with tears in a manner most unnerving, and I could not speak at all. I knelt beside her and she lifted her face to mine and our tears mingled on our cheeks. We have never before been so close in spirit. We did not even go back to bed, but from the divan watched the sun rise behind the poplar trees.

I must find words to suggest that she should not write in this ungoverned manner. No one in China would understand such emotional stress. . . . It is fortunate, indeed, that China is so far away. What my mother and my sisters-in-law would make of her I cannot imagine. The art of expressing a mood through indirection of phrase is a locked book to Mosulla. She knows neither Unhurriedness nor Farawayness. Soft exaltation of mood is beyond her comprehension. Her writing is that of a lettered savage, a mere blaze of crude feeling, and yet it stirs me profoundly and I am frightened in my thoughts.

The best way, I think, would be to instruct her

in the art of poetry as practiced by the masters. First I will explain the intricacies of rhythm and the necessity of modeling one's style on accepted masterpieces. Then I will lead her through the difficulties of fitting good first lines and good last lines to the body of thought and the mood of the poem. It will be time enough, when we arrive at this point, to suggest that no vulgarity of thought or form of sentence construction or wording is permissible in true poetry; and that certain matters there are which may truly exist in the lives of human creatures, but which cannot fittingly be expressed in writing.

I understand Mosulla myself; but who else could understand or respect her? Indeed, the thought has come more than once of late that I cannot, after all, live without her. To awaken in the morning and find no Mosulla by my side, to sit and walk alone, to forget little by little her bright ways and the scent of roses that breathes now actually from my own clothing — of all this I cannot bear to think. Truly my life, my very nature, have changed since I rode out through the Ch'ien gate at Lo Yang and turned my face northwestward. Much that I have thought I can never think again. Much that I have felt is sadly confused now. I have been stirred and quickened. I have touched

ecstasy. Perhaps it is true that after this great joy I shall find happiness nowhere, but in China shall end my days mourning for the girl who gave me her heart at Balkh.

On second thought I shall keep the poem. It is Mosulla. This much of her shall I carry with me after the parting. Wen Fui and the others will never be able to read it, even if it should be found after my death. Yes, I shall keep it.

When I reflect now that up until this very day I have believed her a spy, I am ashamed. When she is asleep to-night, with her head pillowed on her arm and her hair rumpled about her olive-tinted face, I shall kiss her temple and pray to her mysterious god that I may be forgiven for doubting her. Then she will turn, and smile, and murmur happy broken phrases with the thick tongue of a sleeping child, and her arm will slip gently about my neck and rest softly there. And there will be an ache in my heart.

I do not know myself at all.

This afternoon, when I came in, we drank our tea as usual, and she danced a new conceit for me. She is forever contriving steps and rhythms. She delights in them.

Afterward she curled up beside me on the divan

and smiled happily while her breath returned. I remember that she was fingering her skirt of silken gauze, when abruptly she asked:

"Is it true, O my Master, that the silk thread is spun by a beetle?"

I held my breath. Could this be the familiar girlish prattle, or had she a motive in asking? And whence had come that notion of a silk beetle among peoples who had always supposed silk to be a plant like flax or a tree? Certainly I could not answer. The words of General Pan Ch'ao at my first audience came swiftly to mind: "I have been forced to decree that whoever discusses the culture of silk within the hearing of natives of the frontier shall be slain." And that other remark, "Let the Western peoples begin making their own silk and China will suffer an irreparable blow."

Mosulla went on, in her artless way:

"There are, O my Beloved, great men who would pay a fortune in gold for the secret of the silk. My Master could be as rich as a king. We could go together to some distant land and there dwell in plenty all our days."

And then she climbed to her knees beside me and laid her cheek against mine.

I struck her. When then she turned her great eyes sadly on me without a cry, pressing her hand

to the red mark my hand had left on her cheek, I struck again. She moaned then, and I beat her and threw her to the floor where she lay sobbing. Suddenly I wanted to kill her. Rage was in my heart, and a terrible fear.

I rushed away then. To-night I shall sleep alone in the rooms I long since deserted. But what have I settled, and what am I to do? Wild thoughts clash in my brain. This is why she knows so much of the Court and its ways. This is why she is for all her childlikeness so gifted and so wise. They sent her to me to charm and drug my senses and thus steal the secret of an empire. The serpent, Ibn Shu Ber Din, he of the great nose and the sensual mouth and the henna-dyed beard, sent her. And yet I love her. I know that no man possessed her before me. I think I am mad. What am I to do? If I see her again I shall take that satin throat in my two hands and choke her to death. I shall destroy the woman I love. And then I shall destroy myself —here, beyond the world, where no son of Han can ever place papers on my grave-mound, far from the tombs of my ancestors. Here shall I die. They have a drug extracted from the juice of the hemp plant which kills softly. I will walk to the bazaar and buy a bag of that drug. Then, in her apartment, by her side, I will end my life. I cannot go on.

"Come, O my Beloved, and take my life. It is thine. First, if thou desirest, I will tell thee all thy danger. Then will I gladly die."

So she has written. I found the letter under my door.

She knelt before me and rested her forehead on the floor. Thus, in a choking voice, she spoke:

"O my Beloved and my Lord, the two mighty statesmen of Rome it is who wish the secret of the silk. From Mosul to Ecbatana in Media their armies wait. Only the Kingdom of Parthia lies between. To the Wa zir, Ibn Shu Ber Din, and to Her Majesty the Queen have they promised all of Parthia as far as the Portæ Caspiæ and the Southern Sea in payment for the seeds of the silk plant; or if it be a beetle, for that. It is a price beyond the gift of any but the king of kings. For it they will conquer and then surrender a mighty people. This was my secret errand to you, O my Master! I have said it."

She did not lift her head, but waited for the blow. But I could not strike again.

"Why do you tell me this?" I asked, sternly.

"Because I am thy slave and love no other."

"What would the Wa zir do if he knew?"

"He would kill me, O my Master!"

"And he would kill me."

"I fear so. And I beg of thee to fly. The fleetest of horses are in thy stable. No man could overtake thee."

"But if I flee and leave thee behind, then will they torture thee?"

She did not reply. But as I studied her the thought came that in her strange and wild mind she had, like myself, arrived at the end of a shining road and that the executioners of the Wa zir would never take Mosulla alive. My heart overflowed with tenderness. I wished, almost beyond my strength, to lift her once more into my arms that she might rest her dry eyes against my breast until the tears should come.

But I said, "I will consider this," and moved toward the door.

She did not stir.

I opened the door a little way, but then my courage broke and I looked again. I could not endure the sight of her there on the floor, but rushed back and gathered her into my arms and sobbed, myself, like a child.

Like a mocking mask was the face of that officer of the Palace Guard when I received him in my own quarters and offered him wine. I had but a

brief time since returned from the bazaar with the bag of hemp extract. I prefer, in the event of acute danger, to have it by me. I told Mosulla. She agrees that it will be better to die together than singly.

The officer came most pleasantly to tell me that an important caravan is leaving on the morning for the T'song Ling, guarded by responsible officers of Her Majesty's Post, who will gladly convey letters for me.

I thanked him. I even chatted and smiled. He does not know that I have learned the secret of Ibn Shu Ber's diplomacy. I believe they wish me to send letters. Perhaps they have prisoners of my own people, or renegades — for such exist even in China — who would, under the torture, read to them my words. Or it may be that certain of those round-eyed women of the T'song Ling are in their service.

I could not write to General Pan, or to Wen Fui. I might write to Hsu Shen. How far, far away my dear friend seems now! Yes, I might do that, if only to guide my tortured spirit back to reason. And he would enjoy a copy of the poem that Mosulla did not like. But no, there is in it a confession of my love for her. He would not understand that.

The thought arises that I have completed my mission and should now prepare to return to So Kui. But I am a thing of water. I hesitate and drift.

[*The Second Letter to Hsu Shen*]

At Balkh

FRIEND of my youth, in this my exile far beyond the world of men I think daily of you and then my heart is sad and my eyes fill with tears.

I try often to phrase letters that will convey to you a sense of the vast distances of this western extension of the earth, but there is more to tell than can find a way through my brush to the paper. It would be a narrative of barren desert plains that they call Red Sands, in which no thing can find sustenance, and of astonishing great cities where men speak in outlandish tongues and of oases where poplars and willows grow luxuriantly and over wide areas scarlet poppies bloom and wild geraniums and tulips. Balkh lies in such an oasis, not far from a river as great as our own River of Sorrows, that flows into a distant northern sea. It is a city as populous as Lo Yang, the seat of a kingdom that is ruled by a Virgin Queen and her all-potent minister. And I wonder what you will think when I tell you that of the two capitals this is the more majestically beautiful. It seems to me now in a degree treasonable to write such words, and as I set them down I try to imagine how I should feel if I had never traveled farther than from Lo Yang to Chang Ngan and you had journeyed beyond the earth and written such phrases to me. It may well be that I should for the first time doubt your reason or your tongue, and yet what I tell you is true.

The civilization of this people, however, is naturally inferior to ours. Children are not taught to revere their parents and ancestors, and as a natural result there is no such immense national influence as that discipline of home life which is the root of our greatness and our overlordship of the earth. Their religion is in no sense based on a system of reason, but derives from superstitions so dark and so involved with supernatural beliefs as to bring a smile of understanding sorrow to the face of a rational observer. For example, they pay no homage to agriculture and to the beneficent spirit of silk culture, but instead on their altars make sacrifices of animals and even of human beings before mysterious and implacable gods. It is commonly believed amongst them that the vital principle in a human creature passes after death into the body of this or that animal. This by way of punishment, apparently, for misdeeds during life. As an example of this strange belief it may interest and amuse you to learn that in the gossip of the bazaars, where talk often runs as free as among our own people of the streets, the Virgin Queen is already condemned, for her adventurous spirit and her somewhat petulant outbursts of cruelty, to inhabit the body of a tigress during her next life. Often, as I consider these quaint habits of thought, I reflect on the saying of Confucius: "Absorption in the study of the supernatural is most harmful."

As you will infer from the foregoing, they have no rational system of philosophy whatsoever. Their thoughts are often unbalanced and even violent. It follows naturally enough that their literature emphasizes desire rather than reason. The relation of the sexes, which our ancestors so properly relegated to a secondary

place in man's thoughts, is inflamed out of all sensible management. Women, instead of being kept in subjection for man's reasonable use, are given to an adventurous boldness which destroys even the concept of devoted friendship between man and man. Jealousy appears as a factor in every human relationship. I am indeed saddened when I reflect that no friendship can exist long among such a people without a woman sooner or later coming between the two men.

Their poetry, in particular, reflects this barbaric vigor. It is violent to a degree unimaginable in a civilized literature; intensely personal in imagery and breathing a desire for inordinate possession, particularly when expressing the emotion of these free-spirited women. I will admit that there is a somewhat alarming attractiveness to an observer who is gifted with imagination in these passionate and highly colored outbursts of desire. I am driven, often, to a realization, deeper than I ever knew whilst I was at home in China, of the great importance of self-restraint. More than ever I perceive the profound rightness of the Master in so interpreting the sayings of our remote ancestors and in so expressing fully the phrases formed by his own profound genius as to found for all time to come that complete system of philosophy under which we live. At home we accept it without question as the only permissible rule of conduct; it is only when we travel far abroad and witness the customs of other peoples that we become fully aware of its greatness.

Often in walking the streets of this truly thriving city I ponder the manifestations that appear most commonly of this essential want of discipline in their national life. For example, in the punishment of criminals, thieves,

and other offenders not sufficiently important to merit an official trial, the police force the culprit to his knees in the street, draw his head back by inserting iron hooks in his nostrils, and carelessly slit his throat with a knife. He is then left to the agony of his death struggle until the round of the public scavengers with their cart. Often, whilst standing as one of the crowd about such a scene, I have meditated on the finer humanity of our method of cutting the head cleanly off.

And in the case of petty offenders they remove the right hand with a heavy curving sword, without taking the smallest precautions to stay the flow of blood or leaving sufficient skin to cover the stump properly. It is no uncommon experience to witness such unfortunates walking miserably through the streets with nothing but a bloody and unclean garment wrapped about the mutilated forearm. More important criminals, such as those guilty of political offenses, are frequently enclosed in monuments of plaster and stone by the roadside and left, incapable of movement, with only the face exposed, to suffer the attacks of insects and vultures and the horrors of gradual death by starvation. It might be said that our cangue is sometimes employed with considerable severity, but we never disregard the principles of humanity to anything approaching the degree that is here a commonplace.

Regarding my business in this remote region, let me advise you that I was sent by General Pan Ch'ao to secure specimens of the fine horses of the region. There are in my stables two stallions of such strength and spirit that the younger has already killed two men, and yet he has been broken to saddle and will course all day long with more than the speed of a hound of the Hiong

Nu. I have also eight mares, three geldings and eight fillies. The Minister and his agents have been kinder and more thoughtful than I could tell you, and tireless in their efforts to secure for General Pan, of whom I am but the unworthy agent, horses of the finest breeds. They have sent expert wranglers to the western plains and into the boundless mountains of the south. They have scoured Khorassan and Parthia and are even now treating with the chieftains of the nomad tribes of the southwestern deserts known as Arabs; though I am informed that nearly all of the animals now in my stable are of the much favored Arab stock. Were I an accredited ambassador with a peacock feather and a ruby on my hat more could not have been done for me. Naturally, I have hopes that through this good fortune favor may accrue to me on my return to the Yamen of General Pan. But what will you think when I tell you that fifty marches lie between this city and our outposts on the eastern slopes of the T'song Ling? The way traverses wide deserts and lonely mountain passes. Roving bands of robbers infest the roads and many other dangers lie in wait. Men die in the river bottoms of lingering fevers, and in the high altitudes of affections of the breath and throat and heart. Much have I yet to pass through before my long errand can be completed in safety. I beg of my old friend to think often and prayerfully of me. I am hoping for the protection of one of the returning silk caravans on my journey back.

The horses I have been able to collect, you will understand, are taller, slimmer yet stronger, much more beautiful and swifter than any we know in China. Indeed, even those specimens bred by the nomads north of Gobi which are so greatly admired at Lo Yang seem

heavy and spiritless by comparison, in addition to being smaller and immeasurably less capable of sustained speed. The stallion I spoke of, who has already killed two men, is of a reddish color; indeed, when warm, almost a blood red. The other is a dapple gray. My own riding mare I call Mosulla, a name of the region. A marked characteristic of all these soundly bred Arab animals is the blue-black skin, suggestive of antimony. The coat is not thick and shaggy, like that of our horses, but short and silky in the extreme, with the skin easily visible under it. They run, all that I have seen, nearly equal in height, between fourteen and fifteen hands, as they say (a hand is about equivalent to one ch'ih), with long clean legs, wide and deep chest, rather short barrel behind the chest, tail set high, and innumerable physical indications of speed and power. I will endeavor to describe for you my Mosulla.

Imagine a head that is broad and rounded above, sloping inward below to a remarkably fine mouth; with thin, not fleshy lips. The ears point inward so far that they nearly touch. The forehead is prominent; indeed, the shape of this upper part of the head seems, to an admirer, almost human. Certainly Mosulla, for all her nervously high spirit, is amazingly intelligent amongst dumb creatures. The nostrils, noticeably long and extending upward toward the face, are as delicately moulded as an ocean shell; and when she becomes in the smallest degree excited they expand widely, opening upward and outward. Such a head would seem to denote a violent temper; and, indeed, it might were not the brain-pan so large that an excellent balance is suggested between a great liveliness and that nearly human quality which has so endeared Mosulla to me. The eyes in

particular are beautiful; not over-large, but perfectly round and with large pupils; liquid eyes, with fine lids and lashes very long and silky. They are set low, almost midway between the ears and the nostrils. And despite her moments of excitement, I have never yet seen the whites.

The face, as you may have gathered from the above details, is lean and finely drawn, as by the brush-strokes-reducing method of our painters. With the expression in her eyes that I can only describe as tender, with the long, beautifully curled nostrils, the fine muzzle and compressed underlip and that noble forehead (which she delights in holding high), she presents a picture of truly feminine loveliness, an exquisite picture; a picture that changes astonishingly when she is excited or in action to one of bold, square vigor, with the nostrils flaring and the eyes protruding. You may already have concluded that your old friend Jan has learned to bestow affection freely on a mere animal; in which conclusion, I can only say, you will not be far from correct. You should see her follow me about the stable yard, nosing my garments for almond paste or resting her chin on my shoulder for a petting. She will come at my call or at a beckon of my finger.

In action she prefers the gallop to other gaits, and appears to move most easily when running at great speed. Her stride is enormously long, overstepping as far as the length of my arm and half again. Her coat is a rich dark bay in color; the mane darker and very silky and long, as is the tail. Her endurance, like that of all the Arabs, is little short of amazing. She is capable of traveling long distances, all day and day after day. Indeed, we have in China no means of communication so swift as these splendid horses.

Another mare, a gray, admirably bred, in my stables, is the one called Roxana, after the Virgin Queen. She has a splendidly wide and developed upper head, an excessively fine muzzle, long sloping shoulders, high withers, and very long clean legs. She runs, curiously but impressively, with both head and tail high; so that on the occasion when she ran away with Ying (my servant) on her back, head and tail were both so high that with Ying between one got the impression through the flying dust that three persons were riding, instead of one. But Roxana is, nevertheless, a beautiful animal. Taking them all together, the day when I shall have successfully escorted my beauties eastward past all the wearinesses and dangers of the long highway and the T'song Ling and can parade them through the streets of So Kui to the Yamen of His Excellency General Protector Pan Ch'ao will mark an epoch in my insignificant career.

It will, I am certain, please you to learn that I let no day pass without reading devoutly in the Book of Rites and the Odes; for only since I became a traveler among strange peoples and confusing customs have I realized the dangers that lay siege to a man's spirit when he is removed from the restraining influences of the home circle. Yu Tzu said: "The wise man attends to the root; for if this be properly set, virtue will spring from it. And what is the root of all goodness but filial piety and fraternal love?" My deepest regret is that there was not room for the Spring and Autumn Annals in my personal baggage. Mencius I have, fortunately. And of these few books I can only make the best during my exile. In the words of the proverb, I bend my head where the eaves are low.

It is a long letter, indeed, that I have written you, and

vastly more could I write were I disposed to be so inconsiderate in my demands on your leisure, but, bearing in mind the ancient saying that by many words wit is exhausted, and, further, that long visits bring short compliments, I will close at this point, inscribing myself, as ever in the past, your devoted friend and constant companion in thought,

JAN PO

Last night I awoke again to find her weeping beside me. This was puzzling, as we had been happy all the evening, and she had diverted my troubled spirit with many laughable sayings and much quaint and informal dancing. When so minded she romps about the floor as amusingly as one of their long-haired Parthian kittens.

We spoke not a word of our common danger. I had not the heart; nor, I think, had she. Indeed, it must have been the very soberness of our deeper thoughts which gave to our intercourse a peculiarly exquisite quality of delight.

But now her pillow was wet and she could not sleep. I drew her nearer me, and was speaking kindly to her when, with the abruptness so characteristic of her impulsive and ardent nature, she clung to me and murmured brokenly:

"I cannot let my beloved go away!"

I have been trying to picture her as an inmate

of my father's house. It is difficult. Within our eight courts dwell, besides my revered father and mother, my eldest brother, Jan Pu; the second, Jan Kuei-ti; the third, Jan Shuo-i; the fourth, Jan Sing; not to mention the six who are younger than myself. And then there is my mother's mother to whom all of us properly bow the head. Mosulla would therefore have to submit humbly to grandmother, father and mother, and to Pu, Kuei-ti, Shuo-i, and Sing and their wives. In addition Jan Pu was unfortunate in siring five daughters until his wife offered to him her own handmaiden, with whose aid he has since been enabled to present her with two fine boys to her great happiness; and so, in a sense, even this handmaiden would be in a position to command Mosulla's respect if not her deference.

It occurs to me that I could hardly make clear to Mosulla the confusion and the uproar of many voices that at times fills our home courts. It is certain that her freedom of thought and action would trouble all of them; in particular would the women-folk feel concern at the spectacle of a younger wife able to walk and dance about like a man-child on her large feet. As is well known, foot-binding is the surest device for curtailing all dangerous activities on the part of females. During

thousands of years the custom has prevailed, and as experience is the best teacher so we know that foot-binding is right. Women should not be permitted to give rein to adventurous instincts. Their function in life is to bear and rear children and to employ their housewifely qualities in minding and conserving the home which is the foundation of the greatest civilization in the world. How are we to gainsay that?

And the problem goes even deeper. Greatly as Mosulla's sprightly gayety and her amazing dancing charm me, I am moved at times to remember sharply that these are peculiarly the qualities and accomplishments that could not be tolerated in a well-ordered Chinese home. Her very nature would subject her to a torture of the spirit, hour by hour and year by year, under which she must droop and perhaps die. I could never permit the family to know that she has been a slave; but even so they would feel that I had defiled — yes, I must set down that unhappy word — defiled the home of my ancestors by introducing a singing girl as my wife.

Thus ran my thoughts to-day when I came into our apartment and found her practicing certain movements of the dance. She threw me a radiant smile, carelessly and beautifully, as the heavens

dispense sunshine and rain, and went intently on with it. She had discarded most of her clothing; indeed, she is happiest and most herself without it. She actually revels in her splendid freedom and fluid strength of body, just as does that other Mosulla, my beautiful mare.

I stood soberly watching her. She had dropped to her knees, and, extending her lovely arms wide, moved the delicate little muscles which she controls with such amazing skill in a ripple of motion beginning at the finger tips of one hand and flowing lightly up the wrist and arm, over the firmly modeled shoulders (that are so much whiter than the shoulders of our women) and down the other arm to the other finger tips; then back, and back again. And then she laughed, like a happy child, exulting, I could see, in the sheer joy of exercising her talent.

I think our women would dislike her white skin. And they would dislike her great round eyes, where laughter plays at hide-and-seek with trouble and mystery, and her curling silken lashes, and the willow-leaf movement of her hands.

Sometimes I feel again, strongly, that to leave her here is the sound thing. For how can I bear that the woman who is as the humor of my eye should eat vinegar in the house of my fathers?

But then I recall — for I have come to understand this — that she could not return to the harem of Ibn Shu Ber Din after another has possessed her; she would not be acceptable there. And as a slave she could not marry well, if at all. Ibn Shu Ber would hardly trouble himself to give her a thought. Only the Queen might take pity on her and place her somehow in life. But as I have seen the Queen, sitting behind her table of onyx inlaid with gold, as I have observed the scarcely veiled pride and unreasoning young passion in her eyes, I know only too well that in those eyes pity has not yet found a dwelling-place.

The officer of the Palace Guard has appeared again; on this occasion bearing a request that I attend a theatrical representation to-day at the Wa zir's palace. Whether it was to be given in my honor he neglected to state. Increasingly of late I have felt aware of the immense distinction accorded the Roman envoys as contrasted with the bare courtesy granted me. I am, after all, the only representative here of a civilization immeasurably greater than any attained by this Rome. Is there a menace in this? Am I meant to ponder it, and deduce some subtle warning? Ibn Shu Ber is a devious personage. If Mosulla has interpreted

aright the intrigue to steal our trade in silk, why have they not approached me more directly. Am I not, in their eyes, worth bribing? The thing amounts almost to a studied contempt. Or can it be that they fear me as one of General Pan's men? That might well be.

One fact I note with calm. When Mosulla confessed her own small agency in the plot I was for a time — it is so — frightened. For this appearance of weakness I am hardly to be taken to task. I am utterly alone out here, wanting both the detailed information and the authority of an ambassador. I have neither the means of communicating with my own nation nor the aides and secretarial assistants and national servants necessary to command ambassadorial state. The bald discovery that the very woman I loved, who had penetrated deeply my personal existence, was an employee in that intrigue, did, for the moment, unnerve me. For that matter, the magnitude of the intrigue appalled me. It is difficult even now for my mind to grasp it.

True, when my thoughts rove back over the days and nights of my long journey across the western provinces to So Kui, when I picture again in imagination those thousands of trains of camels forever padding westward with their burden of

silk, and consider the immense totals in cost of this traffic to the purchasing nations, it is clear that her notions regarding the intrigue may be less fantastic than they have seemed at moments since. These Yue Che of Balkh derive no inconsiderable portion of their wealth from the profit in the handling and reselling of the silk. It is easily the hugest traffic in the world. And, therefore, even if they themselves possessed the secret of the silk, they would have to stand with China in protecting it unless the Romans could offer them an immense equivalent. For a kingdom they would surrender it. Hence the offer of precisely that — of a kingdom which they are themselves too weak to conquer.

It is, I begin to perceive, a shrewd offer on the part of Rome. If the cost of conquering all those remote provinces on the northwest was not too great a charge on our silk industry, why should the lesser task of conquering Parthia be too great a charge on the Romans? They would be surrendering nothing that they now have, nothing of their own. For that matter, they might trick Ibn Shu Ber, and secure possession of the secret without in their turn making delivery of the conquest, though the Wa zir must have recognized that danger. Clearly he must move astutely and with patience. I begin even to understand why he has

not permitted me even to meet these Roman gentlemen — for in appearance they do seem to be gentlemen — contenting himself with surrounding me with his spies and keeping me in what degree of seclusion he can. I may have made my appearance at a time inopportune for him. Does he suspect that General Pan knows what is going on and that he dispatched me at just this awkward moment?

What an amazing web it is! Strong hard minds are playing at chess with kingdoms as pawns — China and Rome, each but dimly sensible of his opponent, playing at the king of games on the Board of Balkh!

General Pan, come to think of it, does know much. Did he not intercept and search those envoys? And has he not a thousand sources of military and political intelligence throughout this mysterious West? Surely. And I am hardly more in his confidence than in that of old Henna Beard. Possibly there are other agents of China on surveillance here of whom I know nothing at all.

Darkly in the center of this web sits (at a table of onyx and gold, fondling a long-haired cat) that Virgin Queen whose power of movement may have reached, by this time, subtly, clear across the board into the very gates of the Palace at Lo Yang. It is

possible. I do not know. I know only that my brain is staggered. I am weary of spirit. The glimpse, my first, of native theatricals, should prove a divertissement. I hope so. Though, after the spirited and finished performances I have witnessed at Lo Yang, I shall not put my expectations too high. It would not be fair.

Mosulla is moody. I think she is unhappy over this matter of the entertainment. Does she fear that I may utter some unguarded phrase? She has asked me to drink sparingly of the Wa zir's wine. This request nettled me for a moment. In the course of all my rejoicings with her, she has seen me under the influence of wine not more than two or three times. She knows I am not a drunkard.

Or can it be that she fears to have me witness the dancing of the other girls of Ibn Shu Ber's palace?

I will bring her a present from the bazaar, a golden band for her head.

He who rides a tiger cannot dismount!

The palace of the Ibn Shu Ber Din is in itself a city. Through vast rooms and endless corridors they led me. I saw beams of cypress and cedar into which cunning artisans had beaten intricate curving and entwined patterns of gold. I saw

hangings of embroidered satins and cloth of silver. I saw little statues cut from ebony and jade and rock crystal, and great statues of warriors cut from the fine white marble that is found, Mosulla says, in the isles of the Western Sea. I saw men-at-arms and hundreds of servants and eunuchs in silks, and maidens in the gauze woven in Cos from the silk threads of China, maidens whose faces were veiled below the eyes and who looked demurely at me.

Through a portal of marble we passed out to a terrace. Below lay a rectangular pool, into which water trickled over slabs of that shining white stone. Cypress trees stood at the two sides in solemn state, and lesser shrubs and pear trees and apricots. We were to sit on the bright rugs that had been spread over the steps between terrace and pool. A number of the courtiers stood about, greeting me, in each instance, with warm smiles. For that matter, my escort, that officer of the Palace Guard, was smiling broadly. I found this somewhat puzzling.

Heralds with trumpets announced the approach of His Excellency. He came, strutting, on his fat legs and wide-turning feet, pointing upward his absurd red beard. As I regarded him I thought of a fat red spider with a hairy body. I have seen

such in the desert. He, too, smiled knowingly, if without quite the dignity of his attendants. The man has, indeed, no dignity. He has brain and an unscrupulous will, but no innate sense of place. He has power, but not standing. I recall thinking, as he grinned none too pleasantly through the henna-stained whiskers, that his trumpeting heralds, his swarming attendants, his very strut, bespoke a sense of inferiority. It is certain that the splendors of his palace outvie those of Queen Roxana's. For he in his every act asserts himself, stresses himself, in a degree that no truly great man has ever found necessary. He is no natural ruler. It will be remembered that when Confucius had observed: "Shih exceeds and Shang falls short," Tzu Kung asked, "Then is Shih the better man?"... "By no means," said the Master, "to exceed is as bad as to fall short."... Yet Ibn Shu Ber Din is truly a redoubtable personage. To many millions of human beings his smile means wealth and happiness, his frown death.

"Ah, the excellent Jan Po!" he cried, and stood before me.

Naturally, I clasped my hands and bowed, murmuring his name.

"We have much to show you to-day — a surprise, indeed!"

Of what he could mean by that I caught no inkling. He clapped his hands then, and moved to a seat on the carpeted steps. I found myself escorted to his right hand. The gentlemen of the Court found places for themselves here and there on the steps. I saw none of the Romans. He means, so plainly, to keep them from me.

Again the Wa zir clapped his hands, solemnly, thrice; and the red beard poked this way and that in the air as he anxiously looked about to make certain that all was ready. I recalled Mosulla's stories of him, and innumerable bazaar tales; and could now for myself see how greatly he fancied himself as a purveyor of entertainment to his own Court. His pig eyes glittered with excitement, resting now on this group of gentlemen, then on that, with an insolent regard as if he were considering his adventurous personal history, how he had come of a despised race and yet, through his mastery of intrigue, had risen to be a king in all but title. I think he likes to see all these people at his feet. And I think he broods in bestial ecstasy over the more than six hundred beautiful creatures of his harem. Glancing covertly at him to-day, and thinking of his sinister vehemence in every phase of life, mental pictures arose of Mosulla, her gentle smile and the light that burns in her eyes

for me, and I thought of how narrowly she had escaped his fat hands, and suddenly, quite irrationally, I felt moved to seize that dyed beard and twist it until he screamed — as scream he would, for I cannot believe that the man knows personal courage — and then choke him and press in his eyeballs and trample with my traveling boots on his bulging stomach. I found it necessary to sit very quiet and breathe evenly and meditate with determination on the sayings of the Master. I know that he is as widely hated as feared, and wonder why some earnest young patriot does not make an end of him through assassination. Such an end to that life would be fitting.

Again, with that excited glitter in his eyes, the mountebank of Wa zirs clapped thrice. And I heard, softly among the cypresses, the noise of cymbals beaten rhythmically and the plucking of musical strings. A man's voice swelled out, singly, a prologue to the entertainment; in a sort of melody that would sound queerly in Chinese ears, but to which I am growing accustomed in my life with Mosulla. For she is almost constantly singing, and picks with some skill at the lute with the curving body that is like the abdomen of some huge insect. I regard this idea of a musical prologue as excellent, and on my return shall sug-

gest it at Court. Though, to be sure, they would hardly welcome a suggestion of change. As a people we cling strongly to tradition. And perhaps it is best. In most matters, surely.

The prologue over, girls swathed in veils danced in slow measure, chanting as they moved. A soloist then performed with considerable skill. The hidden voice sang poignantly. Other girls danced in a row on the brink of the pool and were exquisitely reflected there.

I observed that the Wa zir turned repeatedly and scanned the corridor through which we had entered the garden. And once he nodded reassuringly at me. I will admit that I was touched by curiosity. What possible thing could take place of any interest to me?

Then they came. I heard the rustling of many robes, and became aware of a craning of necks on the upper steps. The Wa zir turned with nervous abruptness, and then waved, most inelegantly, at me. He even, in his excitement, rose; actually rose — he the Wa zir! Of course the others of us were quickly on our feet. I was aware of a confusion of moving figures on the terrace above us, and of dainty strange melodies beneath in the garden where a satyr pursued with groping senile hands a girl in filmy silk and tore the gar-

ment from her body; this I witnessed before I turned.

At length, above the bared heads of the courtiers on the terrace I beheld — closing my eyes for an instant, tightly, and then staring — one of the conical hats of ceremony that are so familiar at the Court of our own gracious Emperor, with its red tassel and surmounted by a button of lapis lazuli. Then I could see the face. I knew it; but my faculties were scattered and for the moment I could not think. Certainly my body trembled — I recall that — and a sudden weakness in my middle quite unnerved me. For here were Chinese gentlemen, here in Balkh. The face of the foremost became recognizable now. It was none other than Lu Ch'en Ch'ia, younger son of Duke Lu and a boon companion of that precious Prince of ours. Behind him, wearing his crystal button, came Wen — Wen Fui! And last, sauntering carelessly, a tall young man whom I should have known. The prettily poised head, the free firm stride, the air of good-humored unconcern — I knew him, whoever he was; though the slender mustaches that hung from the corner of his upper lip appeared unfamiliar. Surely I knew him. Though even then, as my bewilderment began giving way to certain wild surmises, I realize now that my brain stub-

bornly refused to give shape and sound to the name. An utterly confusing fact was that he strolled comfortably behind the others, strolled with a little glint of mockery in his bright eyes. And he wore a crystal button, like Wen's! I could not at the time figure that out. Could it be that Wen, after all the two months of travel from So Kui, did not know him? — Possibly. He was ever a daring, a consummate actor. And Lu Ch'en Ch'ia would go through fire with or for him. They must have fooled Wen. For that matter, they must as well have fooled General Pan Ch'ao; for he would never, I sensed then and know now, permit the Prince Imperial to slip over the border if he knew. General Pan had not seen him since his childhood. Few others at So Kui knew him as other than an almost mythical personage. As a mere secretary and traveling companion to Lu Ch'en Ch'ia he might easily enough pass unnoticed through So Kui. The General Protector, I know, would have restrained him with any necessary force, would have packed him off home, afterward, perhaps, with dignity, writing his last memorial and taking his own life.

This is the truth of it. With my heart in my throat — for the red spider, if he but knew (as he may), holds now a priceless hostage in his hands

— I drew out Wen this evening. Lu appeared at So Kui with authority from the Dowager Empress, countersigned by the Regent, to convey presents and a message of friendship to the Queen of Balkh. General Pan, aware now that his watch on the frontier had failed, that the message by sea had, after all, made its way to Kin Say and Lo Yang, could only bow to the word from the Throne. Wen Fui he attached to the expedition as a check and an observer. Wen, of course, is not unaware of the delicacy of the situation, and keeps his own counsel. But he has no suspicion regarding the identity of this smiling young secretary with the slender mustaches. It is an amazing situation.

Wen, after I had bowed ceremonially to Lu, actually introduced me to the Prince. The name he uttered was Ch'ing Pao Ch'ien. But the Prince smiled and fixed on me his mocking eyes and remarked:

"Ah, Jan Po! It is indeed a pleasure. We must meet to-night with a bowl of wine and talk of old times at Lo Yang."

"It is more than a relief to find you here, Jan Po," said Lu.

I inclined my head, thankful that the ceremonial nature of the occasion made free conversation impossible.

"We have had indeed a time of it," put in Wen. "We could say only 'Balkh — Balkh,' until they led us here."

"I will present you to His Excellency," said I; and did so, Lu first, and then Wen. At the thought of presenting last, even of presenting at all to that red-bearded frog of a Wa zir, the Prince Imperial of the one truly civilized and all-dominating empire of the world, my knees all but gave under me; but I did it. And the Prince, or Ch'ing Pao Ch'ien, clasped his hands and bowed and, indeed, carried it off with nerves of steel. My eyes filled and my throat choked a little as I watched him, and the swift thought arose: "What a Prince! What a man to follow, and fight for, and die for!" I had to turn away. They must not see me looking at him in that manner.

The rays of the late sun slanted in streams through the cypress trees, lying in mellow splendor on pavement and flat water, touching with gold the shrubbery and the ripe fruit and warming the round bodies of the dancing girls. The tinkling sound of the musical instruments drowsed through the warm air. That soft voice sang on and on; sang of love, that ungoverned and irrational passion regarding which these Westerners are so oddly vehement.

The song died out. The last of the fluttering figures vanished like poplar leaves in autumn behind the cypresses. There was a hush. Ibn Shu Ber Din raised a hand for silence — a hand that was heavy with rings of soft gold set with rubies and emeralds and pearls — and then clapped it against the other. Softly, far away, and drawing nearer, cymbals beat an odd rhythm; and my pulse quickened. Already have I come to feel rhythms as do Mosulla's people, to feel them as separate things, like tunes. They combine rhythms, these people, intertwine and twist them together, give them provocative entity, complicate them beyond anything in our musical knowledge.

This beat I knew. It was the introduction to Mosulla's dance of the draperies. My pulse quickened. For the moment the painful thought arose that she might be here, my Mosulla, to display her lovely person before those cynical men of the Court . . . before my Prince, who might readily fancy her for himself . . . before Wen Fui, who would shortly now, in any event, learn how catastrophically the smooth current of my rational life has changed.

But it was not Mosulla who glided out on the wide terrace behind the shining pool, but a girl of her size and something her slimness, wrapped

about with many draperies, veiled to the eyes, and with thick hair that was cut squarely off at the neck, bobbing about her shapely head as she moved deftly into the muscular complications of the dance. I found myself staring, and then observed that interest had quickened throughout this audience of men. That bobbing hair I had seen before, and the band of Egyptian gold that confined it about the forehead. And I had seen those darkly restless eyes.

I glanced at Ibn Shu Ber. He was looking about, with an all but uncontrollable delight in his beads of eyes, smiling with a knowing expression and tapping out the beat with a thick forefinger. And then I knew that the veiled dancer was the Virgin Queen! She was performing as Mosulla had taught her, and quite as well as my beloved. She has strange gifts, I plainly saw; fire she has, and an intense abandon that even her willful eyes and petulant mouth indicate only in part. Fully developed in body, ripe for life and living, doubtless consumed with hot young desire that knew not yet its mate, she found in the dance an outlet of a sort for what she felt.

But to me the spectacle, though stirring to the senses, was depressing as well. Yes, it was that, it excited and then tore savagely at my emotions.

That it could have taken place at all, here, officially, in the garden of the Wa zir, was incredible. Adventurous as our own beautiful Prince had proved himself, he could never have violated the proprieties openly, at Court. Always he had maintained at least a front of decent subterfuge. Though, come to think soberly of it, strange events are known in the secret annals of every Royal Court. To those of us who glimpse the inner truths, it seems at times that an impish god mocks the fallible human creatures who for this brief period or that must assume the outer divinity of kinghood. Few, indeed, are the men who can bear calmly and in serenity of spirit the power that is vested in a throne.

But never could I have dreamed of this happening. Our Prince here, actually beside me on the carpeted marble steps; here, indeed, unknown to that strange Wa zir until the very hour; hung secretly within his clothing, as I now know, was the pouch containing the seal of Balkh — a duplicate of the one seized by General Pan nearly a year ago at So Kui; in design a young huntress slaying a tiger carved delicately on the hard stone called chalcedony — and a miniature painting of the young Roxana herself . . . and it is I alone who know these strange and stirring truths. My Prince

and his confidant Lu do not know of General Pan's seizure, nor do they understand his policy that is so greatly designed to save and extend the power and wealth of that Empire over which this young man will rule if he survive this most amazing of adventures. Wen Fui knows of the drift and of certain activities at So Kui, but he does not dream that the young secretary, whose silken skirt so lightly brushed his shoulder as they sat there on the steps, is his Prince. And neither knows at all the power and the purpose of Rome. . . . I alone know these things. My brain reels when I try to consider them. I cannot think at all.

Ibn Shu Ber, I saw, was fairly gloating over his masterly showmanship. It was he, after all, who controlled the tone of this strange Court. And since it pleased his inordinate vanity to exhibit his Queen thus to the men of his entourage and to strangers from a far land, he felt no hesitation in playing upon her eager youth to bring her there.

She danced, this Queen, precisely as my Mosulla has so often danced for me. I watched, dreading the disclosures of the climax, for a Queen is not thus to be degraded; but the Wa zir smiled and smiled, with that sensual curve at the corners of his wide mouth. One by one the gauzy draperies whirled away, until the lovely person of the Girl-

Queen stood revealed, with only a jeweled girdle and gauzy skirt and breastplates of gold and emeralds and jingling anklets and head ornaments and face veil (always the face veil) — and then it hurried, to a quickening rhythm from the cymbals, into the muscular convulsions in which the subtle movements seemed to ripple under her velvet skin in a mounting ecstasy until she sank with a final mad whirl to the pavement. And one last yellow ray from the sinking sun caressed her warm skin lovingly.

Shouts of approval came from every side. They knew her, these men, though none disclosed the fact; of course they knew her. And Ibn Shu Ber could not resist glancing around toward us of China in vulgar triumph.

I heard my Prince draw in his breath. I saw him gazing soberly down at the girl as she, laughing excitedly, ran out through the screen of cypresses. He turned to me then and said, in an undertone: "Wonderful! I never saw anything so stirring. Who is she?"

My pulse then nearly stopped. Again the realization that of all that assemblage of shrewd rulers and statesmen my brain alone among them compassed the whole truth was almost more than I could bear. I knew his errand, his very secret mo-

tive; I knew, I alone knew, the perfect thing to say. And I said it, in a whisper, first making sure that neither Lu nor Wen was listening:

"That, Majesty, is the Queen."

He started, then frowned. "My name is Ch'ing," he murmured.

The warning was sufficient. I will, I must, play my little rôle before him. Wen must not know. A Royal life is at stake. Were I, indeed, through one small indiscretion, to fail him, my own unworthy life were poor recompense.

"How are you living here?" he asked next, quickly.

"In an excellent house."

"And you speak their hideous language, Wen says."

"Oh, yes!" With beating temples I achieved that outer semblance of carelessness . . . "Oh, yes!"

"I will move in with you to-night."

That was all. He spoke to Lu — it looked as if he were asking permission — and then had his personal baggage brought here. We dined in my old quarters. Mosulla wondered, but I could not explain. He evidently expects me, even in private, to keep up the pretense regarding him. And I am contriving it. It is better. I am in this way in smaller danger of a misstep in public. So I call him

Ch'ing . . . my Prince! And he, offhand, calls me Jan.

Then, after dinner, he coolly opened his clothing and took out the pouch in which, I knew, were the miniature painting and the seal. He removed the seal and thoughtfully turned it over in his slim hands.

"This," he said, "must be got to the Queen tonight."

That was all of that. He simply left it to me, and wandered out on the roof to gaze at the stars of heaven. And I have sent Mosulla. She knows the Palace and is known. I told her nothing, except that no one but the Queen is to know what she carries. Heavily veiled, accompanied by her maid-servant, she slipped, more than an hour ago, out the garden gate on the narrow side street. None of those spying servants is allowed in the garden.

I am thinking, unhappily, of the change wrought in Wen Fui and in others of our officials on the frontier, by these round-eyed women. I am thinking, if the truth must be told, of the change one round-eyed woman has wrought in me. His Majesty knows no restraint and no law but himself and his adventuring spirit. Who can say what turn may then come in his destiny, in the destiny of the Han? Little Mosulla, hurrying through the streets of

Balkh at night, holds in her tiny hands the fate of a Royal House.

Lu and Wen were here for a time before dinner. Wen looked enviously, I thought, about my luxurious quarters, and for a time surveyed the garden from the hanging window. I could see that his eyes were dreamy with romantic imaginings. And more than once he regarded the corridor that leads to the women's quarters. He smiled in his slightly mocking way as he spoke of the hardships of the journey. Ch'ing, he said, rode amazingly for a secretarial person.

While we were chatting—fortunately at this time Lu had withdrawn with Ch'ing (I must, even in my thoughts, so refer to him) — Mosulla suddenly appeared. I had been in dread of just this; for she runs about my rooms with the freedom of a child; and I had not yet found a moment away from my guests in which to warn her. She wore silken trousers and an embroidered short jacket. She stood, surprised — unveiled, of course — and with wide eyes gazed upon Wen, who bowed. Then she fled. Wen turned to me, smiling very faintly, and lifted his eyebrows. That was all. He even moved back toward the window.

But later he remarked, in his light way:

"You have done excellently well here, Jan."

I burst forth then. It was foolish, but his cool superiority of manner irritated me.

"It is my duty," I cried, "to use every means of investigating the Court of the Wa zir!"

"Doubtless," said he, smiling; and added, "She is very beautiful. I congratulate you."

"But I did not seek her. She was sent to me as a gift. I could not send her back. That would have been ungracious in the extreme."

"Of course," he murmured. "Oh, naturally!"

I said no more then. Silence was plainly better. Besides, what could I say? I was relieved when Lu returned and took him away. He paused at the door to say:

"You surely find it pleasant alone here with your — books."

Lu, I think, noted the irony in his voice, for he glanced at him.

Wen went on:

"I can see that you have acquired favor at the local Court. With your scholarly ability that is but natural. Perhaps you would condescend to suggest that Lu and Ch'ing and I would, like you, deem it ungracious to decline any charming presents that the red-bearded one may feel moved to send us. We have traveled far without refreshment."

With such low thoughts I can have nothing to do. The Master has well said that those who differ in their principles cannot help one another in their plans.

The Prince's personal effects were brought in on the backs of a dozen gigantic porters. There were many bales bound up in travel-stained matting with rope; just as they had been lashed, one weary day after another, on the pack-saddles of his caravan. A number of them I opened for him, gladly installing myself as his personal servant. Six of the bales we left unopened in a corner of his sleeping-apartment. I believe these contain gifts for the Queen; though he was careless as you please about them, merely asking if the native servants entered these rooms. At once, naturally, I assured him that none but myself should thereafter cross the threshold. Thus intimately it is now my privilege to serve him who is in all but official style the Son of Heaven.

Mosulla has not yet returned. I have gone twice to the garden gate on the narrow side street. A second hour is passing. My Prince is on the roof, calmly enough awaiting his answer. I took wine to him, and found him stretched comfortably on a

divan in the pavilion there. Then, as he did not choose to speak, but merely sipped the cool wine, I slipped away and resumed my journal.

Mosulla has not before been out at night in these dark streets. I am deeply anxious. The life of a girl is so inconsequential a thing! So easily could she, and her maidservant with her, be spirited away and confined within walls through which no voice can be heard!

I have not yet dared to meet the present situation in my brain. It is wholly mad. I cannot see to what conceivable end these strange events are moving.

Written at dawn

It was deep night when they came. The Prince had waited patiently, sipping and sipping at the wine. He had by that time drunk a considerable quantity of it; but I could not see that he was in any degree drunken, merely quieter, more aloof. He has a strong head, this greatest of princes.

From the window I heard the faint sound of a key grating in an old lock, and hurried down to the garden. They were coming softly, like ghosts, along the path between the poplars. The terraced waterfalls tinkled through the night; the heavy scent of the roses hung in the air like an aching memory of beauties who have loved in this soft

Persian air and died. My heart beat high as I stood in the shadow, for they were three — three softly flitting shadows moving under the poplars — Mosulla first, walking with the free light stride I would know through any disguise of costume and in any world, and then another who moved as freely, and last the more timid step of the maid-servant.

I held open the door to the women's quarters and they stepped within and ascended the stairs. My mind was fighting my eyes. I could not believe that this third figure could be . . . In my presence they removed their cloaks and veils and I beheld, with the sparkle of adventure in eyes that had hitherto appeared sulky to me, Roxana the Queen.

"Prepare him for her," whispered Mosulla, "while I dress her."

As matter-of-fact as she in outer seeming, I hurried away. So that mad little Queen had come in person, stealing through the night, to the man who bore her seal! How much Mosulla knew then I could not perceive. But she knew much. Nothing escapes those brightly demure eyes of hers. And her life at Court, lighted by the native shrewdness that everywhere on this strange earth is woman, has taught her to accept, always, the fact. She does that, my Mosulla; she is more practical than I.

But if my face was calm, my knees shook under me as I mounted those last stairs to the roof. I have seen men go mad — with drink, or through passion, or in battle. For the first time in my life the thought came, this night, that I might find myself on that unhappy road. Shaken as I have been with passion, such may be my fate. Over and over, as I stumbled along, I repeated those noble words: "The man who can disengage his mind from sensual passion; who can put forth his utmost strength in serving his parents and lay down his life to serve his prince; such a man has received the best and highest sort of education."

Three bronze lamps were burning in the pavilion. Through the lattice I could see, as I moved across the flat white roof, the Prince seated there, with the light flickering uncertainly over his noble figure. I paused outside to recover my breath, for one cannot appear hurried before Royalty; then entered. He put down his cup and slowly lifted his eyes. Then I forgot myself. I dropped to my knees and laid my forehead to the floor. "O Son of Heaven," I began . . .

He exclaimed; but not in a loud voice, for even in his cups he is amazingly himself. I collected my scattered faculties as best I could, and somehow got to my feet.

"She is here," I said then, in a guarded voice.

"Who, Jan?"

"Roxana the Queen."

I had turned then to go, when he called, "Stay! — Now," he said coldly, "repeat this after me, 'Ch'ing, the woman is here.'" And his eyes searched my face.

I said it. "Ch'ing, the woman is here."

"That," he remarked, "is better. Do not lose yourself again, my old friend. Bring more of this excellent wine. And afterward bring the six bales that lie unopened in my sleeping-apartment."

He rose, and smiled. He had thrown aside his heavy robes, and appeared hardly more than a youth in his silken short coat and trousers. I recall thinking then that with the high spirit he exhibited in this adventure he might well conquer new worlds for the glory of the Han. He will be a great Emperor, indeed, if ever he returns alive to China. As to the probability of a safe return, however, I cannot say. Fifty marches eastward stand the majestic white peaks of the T'song Ling. Dangers threaten all the way. And here, in the thrill of hot young blood, we are playing at shuttlecock with thrones. It may be that none of us shall see again the noble rivers and the terraced hills of the Middle Kingdom

—neither my Prince nor Lu the Duke's son nor that mocking Wen Fui nor myself. It is bad enough that Roxana in her savage youth knows no restraint; it is bad enough that the heir to Heaven's Throne is here unguarded and alone; but with passion weaving about their young hearts its silken cocoon the man does not live who could look a day, an hour, into the future. And there are no sane astrologers to whom I could turn. They worship fire here. Their thought is superstition-ridden, their faith a childish jumble of primitive beliefs. . . . A further disturbing thought arises; the gate opens inward on the garden, and that door through which we entered the women's apartment gives directly from the open air into a straight corridor. Evil spirits could have entered freely when each was opened. Indeed, who can imagine what malevolent fates may not have come swarming inward with the Queen, fairly at her side, dogging her steps, surrounding her exquisite person, and surrounding, too, Mosulla and myself. Later, as soon as the gardeners are awake, I shall set them at building a wall within the gate and another before the women's door. I should have thought earlier of this. For we know that evil spirits cannot turn corners. Perhaps it is too late. But a few may even yet be kept without; and by that much may His Imperial

Highness — may my friend Ch'ing — yet be saved to the Throne.

I felt his eyes narrowly upon me, but could not look at him. Then I heard his voice saying, "Take this," and found my fingers closing about a wine-cup. I drank it down at a gulp. He then refilled the cup, and again I drank. He commanded me to sit, and I sank to the edge of a divan, while he paced the floor. . . . I sat, while the Son of Heaven stood before me! But I understand his purpose; he is quite right; it is the only way to carry off the incredible situation. He, plainly, is reveling in the unconventionality as in the danger of it. His eager strong blood rebels against the confining formalities of the Court. For the first time, this night, I have thought that princes and queens are to be pitied rather than envied.

"Jan," he remarked thoughtfully, "what do you make of this, of her coming?"

I hesitated to speak. It was not my province to rebuke or warn my Prince.

"She can't have so much as seen me," he went on. "The message she sent around by that far Southern Ocean — it is a pretty big world, Jan! Bigger than they of Lo Yang dream! A pretty world to rule within one kingdom! — her message begged me either to honor her Court with my

presence or to permit her to journey to Lo Yang and in person lay her tribute at my feet. They gave me her seal, cut in blue stone, and a painting of her pretty self on ivory."

He thrust a hand within his coat and drew the pouch through the opening. From it, then, he drew an oval bit of ivory. "This," he said, "is she. It is a likeness." And he handed it to me. It is, indeed, a likeness; the questioning bright eyes are there, provocative eyes, and the somewhat full mouth in which passion lurks expectantly.

"Her coming to-night is clandestine," he continued. "That is what puzzles me. For that embassy must have been a public matter. Old Red-Beard knew of that, surely."

"Oh, surely," I murmured, thinking rapidly, struggling in this poor brain of mine to frame a course. I could not explain fully, for she might at any moment appear crossing the roof to the pavilion. I watched him, considering how he is, after all, little more than a boy in worldly experience. What could he know of the great silk trade, he with his head romantically occupied with adventure and women? And how could I, all in a breath, explain Rome — a land remoter to him than the farthest star? This was no moment for geography lessons to a mind that had never received any

lesson in good grace. Princes dislike opposition. My attitude must amount to that. I must oppose the very lust of his heart. No warnings of danger would move him; for he thrives on danger.

Doubtless what really stayed me then was the confusion in my own brain. Was Roxana's headlong coming clandestine or was it not? Had Ibn Shu Ber Din sent her? Or had he, smiling within his red beard at the center of his vast web of intrigue, permitted her to think she was carrying off her adventure unobserved? Or had she successfully eluded his watchful eunuchs? . . . Some one within those lofty palace walls must know; for Queens cannot breathe in freedom. What Ibn Shu Ber might not know at the moment he would soon learn . . . soon . . .

A shiver ran through me as I sat there, and my teeth chattered. Ch'ing (I must so write it) must have seen this, for he poured yet another cup of wine for me; and smiled, as I drank it, with a quick light in his eyes.

"Is the game too big for you, Jan?" said he.

Thus lightly he spoke; and yet, perhaps, not in spirit lightly. I think his voice wavered somewhat. Surely even he, in his proudest moment, could not remain insensible to the fact that the woman below was a Queen. It is everywhere worse than

death to trifle with such. He sipped a little more of the wine, and smiled again with a nervously twitching mouth. His moment had arrived, with a suddenness of which he could not have dreamed; the moment for which he had pressed incontinent across the world.

And then my spirit broke. I fell forward at his feet and clasped his knees and cried softly:

"O Son of Heaven — by those ancestors who have ennobled the Throne of Ten Thousand Years — let us escape from this home of devils before that girl is harmed . . . In my stables are the fleetest Arab horses in the whole world . . . There is, O Son of Heaven, a conspiracy to ruin China that reaches from edge to edge of the world — even Your Majesty's august —"

I felt his hand pressed firmly over my mouth. For a moment I struggled like a madman — struggled with my Prince! — but he is strong, and swiftly drew me to my feet and thrust me off, saying:

"Jan!" And then, with a catch in his voice — "She is here!"

I moved to the lattice. Two cloaked figures were approaching across the roof. As they drew near, my eyes glimpsed the shine of metal in the hands of one; Mosulla was bringing her cymbals, the Queen would dance.

Bend your head if the eaves are low!

He looked at me, proudly. And, thinking strangely of the blood-red stallion, I withdrew through a casement and stumbled to a place in the shadow by the parapet. The light of the moon flooded gently the blue-white roofs of the vast slumbering city.

Through the lattice I saw her when she stood proudly on the sill. I saw Mosulla glide into the room, and heard her strike a soft blow with the cymbals. The Prince inclined his head with dignity; but did not bow low. Nor did she. It seemed to me that their eyes struck fire, each against the other.

Ch'ing deliberately opened his coat, drew out the pouch, and, with that painted bit of ivory in his hand, advanced before her, sank slowly on one knee, touched the painting to his forehead, and held it out to her. She was stirred; that I could plainly see. Her lips drew together and her long curving eyelashes for a moment lay on her cheek. Then she did an impulsively girlish thing; she dropped, herself, on one knee, took the painting, pressed it, not with the delicacy he had exhibited, but strongly, nervously, against her lips, and then returned it to him. And this time he bowed low over it. All this I could see by the

pleasantly flickering light of the three bronze lamps.

It interests me profoundly now to reflect that in the manner of this greeting lay the contrast which in spirit separates the two worlds of the East and West. We who know him and who are familiar with the intimate life about the Court of Heaven regard the Prince, not unnaturally, as a somewhat unmanageable young man. And yet, beside this Queen of a Western Kingdom, he appeared as a man of breeding and polish, as, indeed, an exquisite. It is unthinkable that a Chinese Prince, no matter how hazardous his personal inclinations, should escape the influence of our unfailing etiquette, of our noble history, our cultured poetry, our undying traditions. It is unthinkable that a Semitic adventurer should, through cunning alone, seize the power of a Regent and wield it as an instrument of his personal caprice, debasing it through his vanity and his proud ignorance, setting a tone in defiance of history and law . . . Yes, I beheld there, in a flashing moment, the contrast between two civilizations, or, rather, between civilization and barbarism. He, as much as she, had wholly lost his head in coming here at all. Yet he, first and last, was the perfect Prince, while she was but an excited girl. And she knew it. She fell in-

stantly under his spell. Fire smouldered in the great dark eyes that hung eagerly and (I felt this) wistfully on his.

Recollecting myself, I went for the wine. He took it from me, and himself filled her glass.

I withdrew again, and, working like a porter, brought up, one by one, the six bales; then, seeing that he had seated himself, and that she stood poised for the dance, I stood without in the shadow.

The Queen moved her arms deliberately upward and the cloak, Mosulla's cloak, slipped to the floor. She wore the tenfold gauzy draperies of the scarf dance. I could hear the jingle of her bracelets and anklets, and the tinkle of the pendent chains and jewels about her proud head. Her face was flushed, and I could see that her breast moved. For a moment she rested her hands there, as if fearing that her breath would stop; but then, recovering herself and responding to the quickening rhythm of the cymbals, she moved firmly enough into the dance.

It is plain to me now that I fell, for the time, under the spell of the scene and of the night. The soft air lay like satin against my hot cheeks. That heavy scent of roses which will linger with me, I know now, in every clime and place until my spirit

shall be finally gathered to my fathers, touched and drugged my nostrils.

Slowly, lightly, little by little gathering rapidity of motion, Roxana swayed and twisted into the intricate movements and postures of this most enchanting of dances; one by one the shimmering silks fell away from that lithe body. If she be somewhat heavier in outline than my perfect Mosulla, if she be a thought less sprightly in movement, she is perhaps even more skillful in manipulating the delicate muscles of hands and arms and shoulders. Her skin moves and undulates like water under a faint breeze.

The Prince sat motionless; sat like a king, with only his eyes moving as she moved. But I thought he, too, was breathing quickly. And those eyes of his shone. If the dance had stirred him as he sat among other curious men on the terrace in the garden of Ibn Shu Ber Din in the bald light of afternoon, here, in this secluded pavilion on the roof, in the uncertain warm light from the three bronze lamps, here, knowing that she had brought her charms for him alone — if he thought all this, as he must have been thinking it, then one can only wonder at the iron will of the man that kept him sitting quietly there like the king he is. . . . One after another the gauzes fell away. Then, whirling

in a degree of abandon beyond anything I have before witnessed, she emerged, a perfect thing, from the last shimmering scarf.

It was then that the Prince uttered a sound — a hoarse sound that seemed to tear the damask night — and sprang from the divan. I saw him seize that body and crush it in his arms. And then Mosulla, unobtrusively, like a well-trained servant of the strangest of great palaces, blew out, one by one, the lamps, and tiptoed without.

I whispered her name. She hurried to my side and for a long moment clung to me. We were silent then, gazing out over the pale enchanted city. But after a time we fell softly into talk.

I noted that she placed an object on the parapet behind me, and turned to see. It was an hourglass.

It seems that she made her way to the Queen's apartments with the knowledge of two of the eunuchs and one lady-in-waiting. None of these three, she believes, is among the spies of the Wa zir; for such are hated by the entourage of the Queen, and are, in a degree, known.

"It was as a spy that I was first placed there," she added, "but I never gave the head eunuch of the Wa zir a true report. Much I did for Her Majesty. She trusts me, I think. Often have I

borne messages to her, and little was thought of my appearance to-night. I explained an errand to the lady on duty, and then, through her, reached to the Queen."

"But how did you explain yourself to her?"

Mosulla lifted her eyes and thoughtfully studied my face. "I said nothing, O my Beloved. I but gave her the seal that last year she sent to your Prince. I knew, as she knew, that none but the Prince could have returned it to her. Already she had learned of the arrival of the embassy from far-away Ch'in. She asked if he had witnessed her dance in the afternoon. When I told her that he had, she was greatly moved. She asked then where he was staying, and, when I explained that he was secretly here, she insisted on going to him. It was my thought to suggest that she be patient for a time and plan every step with care, but she knows no patience. She has waited a long time for this, and she does not like to wait. I can see that she has lived this meeting over and over in her imagination. . . . No, nothing could stop her to-night. I have never known her in so headlong a mood, turbulent as she often has been."

"The Wa zir will learn of this," said I, finally giving voice to my thoughts.

She inclined her head. "He may. It seems

likely. Certainly if she comes many times. But there are those about her who will guard her secrets even as I will. And she did plan her escape with care and skill. She has, you know, a strong and clear mind. It is that which makes her so difficult to guide. First she sent me away, instructing me to wait outside a garden entrance by the river. A long time I stood there before she appeared. I was frightened" — she nestled within my arm — "but no person passed. Then we hastened across the city by the more quiet streets." She glanced moodily toward the dark pavilion. "But she must not stay too long here. It is very dangerous."

"We can hardly speak to them."

"No, we cannot do that."

"He should never have come."

She assented soberly to this.

"My brain is tortured with fears, blessed Mosulla. It cannot be that this is love, as ours is love."

"Certainly not. It is adventure. And more, it is revolt. She is beside herself. And she is playing for a greater kingdom than this of Balkh. She would, for that, go through anything."

"She will tempt him to reveal the secret of the silk."

"Certainly."

"That thought unnerves me. For he is no more than a boy, seeking his pleasure where he will. Little does he understand of the great traffic by which nations build their wealth and for which armies struggle."

"Remember, Beloved," said she, "that they cannot speak together. Only through your tongue can their minds meet."

I had forgotten that. She went on:

"You must prepare his mind. Tell him of Rome and of that which they would take from China."

"He might not listen. And he might not care."

"But you must tell him."

"He is as headstrong as she. And now he is excited. He is my King. If I oppose his wish, he will give me, with ceremony, the silken cord."

"What is that, O my Beloved?"

"It will mean my death."

I felt her warm body close against my own. "But you must tell him," she breathed.

Mosulla turned the glass. The moon was higher now in the sky.

"He should never have come," I said. And she repeated my words, "He should never have come."

"I cannot see ahead."

"Nor I." Her arms were about my neck, her cheek against mine; and her cheek was wet.

"They are forgetting everything. And the life of my Prince hangs by a thread."

"Thy life, too, O my Beloved." With a little sob she added then — "And mine."

"If thou goest, my Mosulla, then, within the hour, I shall follow thee."

"But not if thy Prince lives. Thy life is not mine, but his."

Mosulla turned the glass. Bowing to fate, we talked more quietly.

"I feared disaster for this splendid young man when, two years ago, I tutored him in the classics. For he would not study. Confucius has told us, Beloved, that the six virtues are waited on by six shadows. Love of goodness without the will to learn casts the shadow called foolishness. Love of knowledge without the will to learn casts the shadow called instability. Love of truth without the will to learn casts the shadow called insensibility. Love of candor without the will to learn casts the shadow called rudeness. Love of firmness without the will to learn casts the shadow called eccentricity. Love of daring without the will to

learn casts the shadow called turbulence. . . .We should bear these truths in mind. For therein lies the weakness of my Prince. I fear he has not the will to learn."

"Nor has the Queen," she murmured.

"Other words of wisdom we have from the Master in this same vein. 'I would not,' he said, in answer to a question from Tzu Lu, 'choose as commander of an army a man who would attack a tiger unarmed, cross a river without a boat, or sacrifice his life without a moment's regret. Rather should it be one who would not embark on an enterprise without anxiety, and who invariably lays his plans shrewdly before putting them into execution.' In no words could the perhaps fatal weakness of my Prince be more clearly stated. He is — "

Her soft hand stopped my mouth. Intently she listened; then whispered:

"There are men in the street below!"

And as she spoke I heard noises and the jingle of metals.

Together we rose and peered cautiously over the parapet. Four soldiers were sauntering by, doubtless men of the watch released from service on the walls of the city.

Somewhat relieved, we resumed our positions on the rugs and cushions I had brought up to the roof.

The moon had arched across the zenith and was slipping down the western sky.

"I did not know," said she, "until she mentioned it to-night, that the Queen danced to-day before the men."

"She should not have done it."

"It was dreadful. These, O my Beloved, are the matters that frighten thoughtful attendants at the Court. They are altogether the fault of the Wa zir. He has no taste. He is, indeed, a vulgarian. And yet his powers are absolute. It is commonly said that the Queen Dowager, Roxana's mother, would rise in horror from her grave could she know of these goings-on. Ibn Shu Ber loves more than all else to exhibit his power over great folk. He must have rejoiced to-day when the Queen danced at his behest. For that is how he is. Terrible things are done at his palace. That is when he and the nobles are drinking. On a night when he was entertaining the Roman gentlemen at a great dinner, he caused two beautiful virgins to be ravished and then slain. He had heard of the magnificence of the Romans in their own homes and of their power over their armies of slaves, and so in his rude way he exhibited his own idea of power to them."

I could not resist shuddering and drawing her closer within my arms.

"But that is monstrous!" said I.

"It is life," said she soberly, and dismissed the matter with a movement of her pretty shoulders. "Those things in a way are not so bad. Roxana's own ancestor, the great Iskandar — "

"That will be the one they also know as Alexander?"

"Yes, Alexander is the Greek form of the name. His hands were red with blood. All about this region, as in Khorassan and Mosul and Azerbaijan and Parthia, and north in Merv and Maracanda, you will find the legends of his terrible deeds. He was very young, you would understand, my Beloved, and ruthless and strong. He enslaved all Balkh and Sogdiana, and had consumed by fire twelve myriads of people in this region alone. He knew no restraint and no kindness. He slew girls and children and mothers."

"Is there a possibility," I asked, later, "as you know the Queen, that she may come to love my Prince, even as you, my Ruby of Rubies, have learned to love me? And might she not then wander from the Wa zir's purpose?"

"It is possible," she replied musingly. "Anything is possible. Already, through much brooding, she has lost her head. He is, I believe, her first man, as you are my first and only man. I know for

myself how confusing great emotion can be, and I know self-discipline, which she knows not at all. Too, she is vastly more turbulent than I. Yes, anything is possible."

For a time she thought intently, with brows drawn down; then continued:

"But she is cruel, which I am not; and vastly ambitious. She has no mind, only a great restlessness. Passion will excite her, naturally, but I hardly think it will confuse or weaken her. It may even strengthen her purpose, for she is most dangerous when most excited. A great many women, I think, give rather than take. It is woman's place to submit and live meekly. But Roxana is not weak. She gives nothing — she takes. Even tonight, in her ecstasy, she is, I believe, taking, not giving."

"In that event," said I, "we may have to face a battle of strong wills. For my Prince never gives."

"I have thought of that, too," said she simply. "This, O my Beloved, is how a woman loves. She gives herself, at first, because she must or because she will. Then she is frightened at her own emotions and thinks of hiding herself away, thinks even of death. But then, when a little time has passed, Nature whispers at the ear of her heart and she yearns toward her man. Thus again she gives

herself, to a stranger, and yet again and again. So she begins to know him, and little by little learns either happily that she loves him or sorrowfully that she does not." She slipped her hand into mine.

"My fear regarding the Queen, O my Beloved, is that when the day comes she may feel hatred toward the man. It is possible. And in that case she might take the worst possible steps against him. But we must bear in mind the truth that she gave because she would. It is the woman who gives because she must that turns so wildly to hatred." She caught herself, glanced around somewhat timidly, and then for a moment pressed her lips to mine before resuming. . . . "The one thing of which we may be certain is that Roxana will act with violence. It may be that she will thrill all day with the expectation of again resting in his arms."

"But she cannot come here every night without certain discovery and scandal," said I. "That way lies tragedy."

Mosulla inclined her head. "But who is to stop her?"

"Ibn Shu Ber."

"Certainly none other. At any rate, we will do well to remember constantly that this passion is not love. We know neither when nor if it will become

love, for love is at once a miracle and a growth. And we must remember as well that Roxana is the proudest woman in Balkh. She loves her Royal blood, she loves the power she thinks she has — which one day she will in truth have, if she live — and she loves thinking of herself as the instrument of world-shaking intrigue. So we may be sure that she will not forget her purpose in seeking out the Prince. One day, it is possible, but not now . . . Remember, my Beloved, she is proud. Restraint she knows not, nor religion, nor taste. Under the rule of this Ibn Shu Ber she will learn none of these things. That is her misfortune, as it is the misfortune of the whole kingdom. Indeed, often I think that Balkh may yet be destroyed by God for the evils this man has done. But even though she be a spoiled girl, a wicked girl, she is proud. Nearly all of Parthia has been promised her. No Queen in all history has ever been given so much. She knows that. She knows a good many things, for, though willful, she is never stupid. And can you not see, O King of my Heart, how her passion must be great, indeed, to win her from that great thought?"

Mosulla turned the glass. The moon was low.
I fingered her silken robe.
"Know, sweet Mosulla," I said to her, "that the

silk is neither a tree nor a plant nor the produce of a beetle, but a worm."

She drew her breath in sharply and fixed her great dusky eyes on mine.

"A worm, or grub, it is, my Pomegranate, that feeds only on the leaves of the mulberry tree."

"But we have mulberry trees here in Balkh, and in Parthia, and in Mosul!"

"Yes. Often I look at them and think of the secret of my people. Try to paint the pictures with your thoughts as I tell you the story."

"You should not tell me."

"I must. My life is thine. I wish no secret from thee. . . . In each of the lands of my people, in those lands that lie beyond the Heaven High Mountains and the Jade Pass, are villages in tens of thousands where dwell a peaceful agricultural people in pleasant walled homes. Thus it is in the lands of Ch'in and Ch'u and Yueh and Wu and Lu. And in each household of these pleasant villages the womenfolk take from the rafters, in April, the bags of tiny eggs from which the worms are to creep out. For the eggs, O Beloved, may be kept without harm so long as heat touches them not. All winter these eggs hang from the rafters in their bags. They are placed in warm dung and there hatched out. Then the young worms are placed on the green mulberry

leaves and left to eat their fill, with fresh leaves added each day. The girls of the family watch at night to make sure that none escape.

"When they are well grown, the housewife each day holds them up to the light. When they become transparent she knows that they are ready to spin and places each on a sheet of rice paper. There each spins about itself a cocoon of the delicate filament that is called silk. During all of four or five days they spin tirelessly. But finally the structure is finished and they seem to shrivel within it, even to die. But they do not die, for if left to itself the worm changes beautifully into a moth from which more eggs can be obtained. But the moth, in emerging, destroys the cocoon. Accordingly, when the silk is desired, rather than the eggs, the cocoon is held to the ear and shaken. If it is finished, the worm rattles within like a bean in a dry pod. It is then plunged into hot water to kill the worm, and the filament is wound off on a reel. And from that thread, O my Apricot Blossom, is woven the cloth that covers your adorable body.... Thus it is in all the villages of Ch'in and Ch'u and Yueh and Wu and Lu. Thousands upon thousands of villages and tens upon tens of thousands of families! Thus is made and spun the silk that the tens of thousands of camels bear daily westward through

the Jade Pass to the Heaven High Mountains, there to pass to your traders of T'ai Can and Balkh and through their hands to those of Rome. If the secret of the silk is to be lost to China, all those families will suffer beyond repair! Can you wonder, then, that the great Pan Ch'ao stands like a giant across the western path at the mountain wall of the T'song Ling? Can you wonder that the Throne has styled him General Protector of the Sons of Han? Can you wonder that each year in the third month we burn the costliest silks as a sacrifice in the great bronze urns that stand in the temple of Heaven?"

Suddenly, all warm impulse, she pressed her lips again to mine.

"You have told me!" she breathed happily. "You have told me!"

Then, more like her matter-of-fact self, she said:

"But if the eggs can be kept all winter without hatching, they could easily be transported."

"Oh, yes," I admitted, "eggs enough to ruin the trade of China within a generation could be hidden easily in a bamboo stick and brought without discovery over the T'song Ling."

Mosulla turned the glass.

She took from her bosom a packet containing two

small boxes of a dark powder, one of which she handed to me.

"It is surer than the hemp juice," she said.

With a string which she tore from her garments I tied the box and hung it about my neck inside my robe.

THINKING OF MOSULLA AT DAWN IN BALKH

My love is no pliant willow;
She is no peach bloom to perish at the first wind. . . .
She is a spear-orchid of delicate sweet fragrance;
She is a lotus blossom floating on bright water;
She is a chrysanthemum which smiles at frost;
She is a crested pheasant;
She is a mandarin duck.

In a land which knows not the Book of Odes,
Hand in hand, silent, on a dim roof,
Death grins out from each uncertain shadow.
We are like the paired-wings bird, my love and I;
We have each but one eye and one wing,
Separated we flutter to the ground.

Mosulla caught at my sleeve. I held my breath.

"They called," she whispered.

I heard it then, a single clap of the hands.

Together we hurried to the pavilion. I found my way to the softly glowing brazier and lighted with clumsy fingers the three bronze lamps. Then I knelt and rested my forehead on the floor. A rustling of silken garments and a whiff of rose per-

fume told my ears and my nostrils that Mosulla was kneeling beside me.

"Bring the parcels," said His Imperial Highness in a voice strangely gentle.

As I hurried to obey, my senses gathered in a confused impression of my Prince standing by the lattice, very straight and tall and strong, and of the Queen lounging restfully on the divan among the cushions, looking out at him under lowered lashes like one who dreams. She had drawn about her his satin robe, wearing it as carelessly as Mosulla so often wears mine. Her mouth no longer had the sulky expression I had before seen there, but was soft and very sober. Plainly she did not know I was there, or Mosulla; she saw and felt only the tall young man by the lattice who would one day rule the world and who at this moment, in a measure that had sobered and perhaps frightened her, ruled her own perverse spirit. She had laid aside the band of Egyptian gold that circled, usually, her forehead, and her short, thickly silken hair fell unheeded partway across her flushed face. Dignity like his she had not in her nature; never could that fact have been plainer. Indolently she lay against the cushions, slowly moving the tips of the fingers of one hand to and fro over a bit of the robe that encompassed her, as if the sensation of

contact with that exquisite smooth surface blended luxuriously with her reverie.

I brought the bales in, one at a time — two were very heavy — and placed them in a row along the wall. For a brief time I fumbled with the knotted rope of one; then realized that I should have brought a knife. I found myself muttering an apology, and hurried off downstairs, greatly disturbed; but I think now that neither the Prince nor Roxana knew, other than vaguely, dreamily, that I had made them wait. I cut the rope and stripped off the travel-stained matting, only to find a casing of soft, almost paperlike lead. I had to cut through it. Yet within this were wrappings of silk. Reverently I removed these.

The first article discovered was a vessel for meat offerings, bowl-shaped, with three legs of curving design and two plain handles with three recumbent oxen, beautifully modeled, on the cover. The material was of heavy soft gold, pure gold, laid evidently on a foundation of bronze. My hands trembled as I lifted it to a table, for I recognized at once that it was a precious relic of the Chou dynasty, not less than a thousand years old, probably even older, and that it could have been preserved only in the Royal collection. I glanced respectfully at the Queen and observed a light

creeping into her somber eyes as they perceived the dull shine of the gold.

The Prince lifted the cover with his two hands, and, dropping on one knee before the girl, in his most courtly manner, held it so that she might see the inscription that was graven within — Chu nu yi ta tzu tsun yi — and commanded me to translate it for her. This I promptly did, in an uncertain voice, rendering it in the Yue Che tongue as, "Vases and dishes provided for the Heir Apparent by the ladies of the Royal Household."

The second article was a vase of about our own time, made, I should imagine, within the century, of potter's clay, and finished in a lustrous green glaze that was mottled over with darker clouds of a finely crackled texture. The ornament was of a mythological nature, indicating, in low relief, tigers pursued by men with drawn bows in their hands riding upon dragons. The handles were rings supported by the heads of strange monsters. The symbolism of the design had to do with the eternal cosmic conflict between Earth and Heaven.

By this time I knew well enough that the Prince, for this most romantic moment in his young life, had chosen to lay before Roxana certain of the most priceless treasures of the Palace. In his breast, indeed, was none of the statesmanlike

restraint that had guided General Pan Ch'ao in selecting presents. In this lavish bestowing upon the Queen who had become so swiftly his lady love he found, I knew, delight; and my heart was troubled.

A ring, very heavy, of entwined dragons, he placed himself upon the finger which, as if by right, she yielded to him. A necklace of engraved silvered gold, with an intricately carven symbolical lock by way of pendant, he placed about her neck, whilst, like a child, she bent her head forward. Two long hairpins then he placed in her thick hair; hairpins topped with worked silver from which bright ornaments hung quadruple strings of pearls, caught together by three clasps, nearly to her shoulders. They laughed softly together over the difficulty he encountered in securing them within the confines of her loose short locks. I do not think he ever before saw a woman's hair that was not coiled about her head or built up into formal dress with combs and ornaments and jewels. After that her slender fingers played moodily with the pearls, feeling them between forefinger and thumb as if the smooth surface pleased her as had the silk.

Next he placed upon her head the most beautiful bride's headdress I have ever seen, a tall arch of

silver gilt in elaborate filigree that was designed to represent the heads and wings and tails of kingfisher birds; the eyes were emeralds, and large pearls were set everywhere in the delicately intertwined metal work to give it luster. At the top of the arch, between the two birds' heads, was a shining little temple with pagoda roofs; and decorating and softening the outer edge were seven round balls of tufted green silk with tassels. . . . And he fastened at her waist a châtelaine of toilet implements, also in silver gilt, with daintily made cleaners and scrapers for her pretty nails, and a brush-pencil for her eyes and a brush for her lips, and other devices for which women find strange but charming use.

Two of the bales contained only jade and nephrite. I have never before seen so exquisite a collection. Roxana's eyes opened and lighted and danced as one by one the objects, perfectly carven out of the most precious of stones, emerged from their silken wrappings and found places on the tables and stools, even, toward the last, on the floor. There were vases for flowers, dishes for fruit, and wide-mouthed bowls; there were other bowls, cups, and ewers for wine; there were round medallions and oblong tablets with happy inscriptions; there was a tall wine-pot of the purest,

mossiest, hardest green; there were table screens carved with landscapes and one with the eight immortal genii, and others with dragons; there were Ju-i scepters and fretwork mirror stands, hairpins, combs, earrings, studs for the forehead, bracelets, incense-bowls on tripods (Mosulla slipped away and returned with a cube of incense which she lighted with a coal), sculptured flowers and handfuls of jewels lying carelessly in jade-pots, rouge-pots and powder-boxes, carven fish and monkeys and lotus-blossoms and endless knots, linked chains, seals, fan-screens with tasseled ornaments, keyless locks, bangles, and one perfect priceless vase cut into the form of the magnolia yu lan, of a pure milky white, polished to an astonishing semblance of this pulpy white blossom. In color these beautiful objects were apple-green, white with spots of emerald green, gray-green, celadon, lettuce-green, grass-green, and the green of boiled beet-tops. Besides these exquisite shades there were the green-yellows of the nephrites, grays tinged with blue and red, the soft whites of cream and whey, and the perfect limpid white of mutton fat that is, of course, the rarest and most beautiful of all.

The three remaining bales contained silks. Two were of medium size, the third very bulky and

heavy. I opened one of the smaller and found it to contain articles of clothing. Roll after roll I opened of shimmering gauzes woven in transparent pattern, the most beautiful I have seen. Mosulla deftly helped me unroll them and herself spread them on the divan where the Queen could see and finger them, which she did with a breathless, unsmiling happiness, turning from them only for a moment at a time in order to drink from the wine-cup that stood on a table at her elbow. I noted that she did not sip daintily, as we do, but with an eager relish; and I noted further that the Prince stood ever ready to fill her cup; and that more than once he sipped from it himself; deliberately and with the quiet elegance of manner that is his alone, turning it in his fingers and placing his lips at the precise spot that had been touched by her pretty painted lips. She, too, saw this, and once lifted her full, contented eyes to his and faintly smiled. And then his hand found her shoulder and during a brief space rested lightly there.

Beneath the gauzes, all of the sort that Mosulla has termed, in her quaint native phraseology, Coa Vestis, were larger rolls. Opening these we discovered garments made in our own manner, heavy coats and robes embroidered elaborately in flowering designs and with the threads that are made by

twisting leaves of pure soft gold about strands of the silk. One was a woman's sleeveless coat, with a design of baskets of flowers and fruit, that is, of peonies and lotus and chrysanthemums and the nelumbium water-lily with its characteristic seed-pods, and hand citrons and sprays of bamboo and pomegranate and peaches, tied with wavy fillets and woven in many vivid colors with much bright gold on a ground of dark blue. The border was a narrow strip composed of interlacing sprays of orchids. I have spoken of this garment as being woven, for it was, indeed, a product of the loom (k'o ssu) and not embroidery, though I noticed evidences of brush-work here and there. As is well known, our finest examples of woven silk are often thus finished and embellished by the painter.

Nothing would suit the Queen but to slip this garment on; and accordingly she stood erect and let fall the Prince's coat, stood, indeed, again, but this time without self-consciousness, in the scanty costume of the dancer. Me she wholly ignored. I might have been a eunuch. Attired in the long coat, she turned and pirouetted before the Prince as pleased as a child. The next garment was opened, which I was somewhat shocked to find a marvelously embroidered Imperial robe of heavy satin, a pale apple-green in color, with a represen-

tation of dragons rising from the angry waves of the sea and ascending into the clouds. The five-clawed dragons were in pursuit of rolling discs that gave forth effulgent rays symbolizing omnipotence. Mingled with the clouds were flying bats, designed to express the ideal of happiness, and swastika symbols linked with circular shon characters, or ten thousand years. The collar and cuff bands were of dark blue satin; the pale blue lining of that soft silk known hereabouts as damask. It gave me small comfort to reflect that she could not understand the full significance of the gift. She at once wrapped it about her supple body over the sleeveless coat and lifted her enchanted young face to the Prince. He smiled after that and motioned us to continue. And accordingly we laid out the other garments one by one on the divan.

He next indicated the bulkier of the two remaining bales. Cutting the ropes and rolling back the protective lead foil, I discovered piece after piece of the finest specimens of brocades that have existed in the world; cushion covers there were, and temple hangings of silk velvet, and several bed coverlets. All were products, of course, of the Imperial looms at Lo Yang. The first of these nearly took away my faltering breath. It was a coverlet of red satin, with a great golden dragon in pursuit

of a jewel covering all of one side and an heroic crested pheasant with a spray of peony in its beak the other, and between them, worked in with a needle, a large double-joy character (shuang hsi). It seemed to me then, and so it seems now as I write, that he should not have given her this. I wonder what the General Protector would think if he knew.

There were also three other rolls of brocade of the sort the Emperor Ming Ti and other emperors since have been fond of giving as presents to the rulers of distant states. The designs included the familiar flower-patterns mingled with the Storied Palaces and Pavilions, Tortoise-Shell Grounds, Eagles with Sprays of Flowers, Musical Instruments, indeed, all the standard symbolical designs.

Another large piece of silk velvet bore woven designs of the sacred lotus in conventional double pattern with flying bats in pairs. There was a flowered velvet robe with a broad bold swastika border; a riding-coat with raised peonies, chrysanthemums and great butterflies on a blue silken ground; and nearly a score of other glorious examples of the weaver's art, all of which we spread before the Queen. Of the significance of all the complicated and subtly, skillfully pictured bits of design she could have, naturally, no perception.

But it interests me to reflect that all the twelve ornaments (Chang) of the ancient sacrificial robes were represented in the collection. The Sun was there, with its bank of clouds and its three-legged bird inside; the Moon, with its hare and its pestle pounding in a mortar the elixir of life; the Constellation of three stars; the Mountains which we so properly and so devoutly worship; the two five-clawed Dragons; the Flowery Fowls, or pheasants, in the usual pairs; the pair of Temple Vessels with their familiar tiger and monkey; the sprays of Aquatic Grass; the flaming scrolls of Fire; the medallion with Grains of Millet in groups; the Axe; and the Fu symbol of honorific distinction. . . . The Prince must have felt that the twelve should all be there.

I wondered what could be in that last precious bundle. And, too, I thought soberly of the swift passage of time. This Royal young couple had apparently forgotten everything in the world excepting their own great happiness. With Mosulla's dear presence ever in my thoughts, with memories of this and that moment in our own great happiness coloring exquisitely and always of late my own mood, I could feel with them; but I could not, as seemed so easily possible to them, forget the dangers that lay everywhere about them and all of

us. I observed Mosulla, on one occasion, glancing discreetly out the window toward the eastern sky. She would forget nothing. She is not a woman, Mosulla; she is a being; she has a mind; she has character. I have not known her like.

Quickly I opened that bundle, and almost as quickly perceived roll upon roll that could be nothing less than certain of the precious, priceless woven silk pictures that hang, or for so long have hung, in profusion on the walls of the Palace of Heaven. I have for years believed that in these splendid pictorial representations of life Chinese craftsmanship has reached its summit. They seem to me the very flower of our art. I would not have supposed that even our ardent and wayward Prince would actually have taken famous treasures out of the Lo Yang Palace because of his sudden flaming interest in a remote and over-forward young Queen; but this he has done. I could say nothing; I can say nothing now.

One by one we unrolled the scrolls, which were exquisitely mounted on ivory sticks, carven at the ends, and tied with silken rope spun out into tassels with tags of jade, and spread them before the wondering eyes of the Queen. It was plain, indeed, that she had never seen their like. There was first an astonishing number of the wall panels, on which

were depicted scenes of nature, such as the familiar trees and flowers and flying birds, also decoratively curving bridges and lakes with island temples and tea-houses and, of course, mountains; and interior views portraying the simple virtues of husbandry and housewifery, on which the might and majesty of the Han rest as on a foundation of the firmest granite. . . . I noted with interest that, while Roxana studied the pictures with surprise and alert interest, she found a peculiar delight in laying her quick fingers on the silk and softly stroking it, as she had fingered the robe she wore when Mosulla and I reentered the pavilion and the strings of pearls that hung from her new hairpins.

The larger scroll pictures were the last to appear from the bale. In these, I believe, the Prince found the most to charm his boyishly eager senses; certainly he bent over the rolls with me and even, at moments, helped me get them out and open them. And they were, in truth, magnificent, the finest by far that my own imperfect and unworthy eyes have ever beheld; literally they were the most perfectly and beautifully woven pictures in the world, here in the pavilion on my roof in Balkh, passing, each one, through my own clumsy hands. And my brain burned with the thought that this headstrong, charming, dissipated, beautiful, truly noble,

truly Royal youth had not only crossed the earth secretly to gratify a whim, suffering hardship, boredom, and an incredible approach to ignominy, but had actually stripped from their walls in the Palace of Heaven the ultimate sacred treasures of his Ancestors for gifts to a slip of a barbarian girl with short hair whom he had not even seen.

I ponder this in bewilderment. I do not understand him. Is it the instinct for adventure in the breast of a high-spirited lad on whom Heaven has bestowed the power to gratify every caprice? Is it that search for the other, the else, the beyond, that has throughout all known history led out so many men of imaginative spirit into that chasing after thistledowns and will-o'-the-wisps that can seldom carry him to any end other than confusion and a final sense of wasted substance and, not seldom, catastrophe?

It is not as if we were in ignorance of the true way. During every waking hour of every day the admonitions of the Master touch our ears and our eyes. Full well we know this precept: "Who can go out of a house except by the door? In living, then, why not pass through the door of virtue?"

I am but ten years older than the Prince of Han. Why, then, cannot I understand this mad performance of his? I have known what it is to wander

from the Way, in those younger days, surely. But I cannot seem to recollect my emotions of the period. Can it be that I am too old? Or that I am not yet old enough?

And I cannot at all understand the Queen's coming. Why did she do it? There were other ways, with only a little patience, of managing this headlong Prince of ours. He, all of us, are helpless in her hands, as in those of old contemptible Red Whiskers. At the time the full force of this catastrophic act — I cannot in my present state of mind use a lesser term — did not make itself felt in my brain. I was merely frightened then, and confused. But now, as the golden sun rises in the sky, now as I write, my mind freezes at the thought of this awful thing which has taken place. That mad girl has thrown away the virtue that Ibn Shu Ber could have and doubtless has planned to barter for a kingdom. He would have married her to the Prince, but hardly if she were to be removed from this miasmic scene; for he needs her to mask his every intriguing move. Our Prince could not for an instant consider surrendering the Throne of Heaven in order to dwell and die in the absurd little kingdom of Balkh. Ibn Shu Ber will learn what has taken place. Death would be, if brief, a merciful punishment. This boy and girl, certainly, if

their hearts are on fire as I believe, as I too well know they are, will within a few more days be out of their minds with love. No one can foresee what mad thing either will do.

Straight trees are felled first!

My brush has wandered far. My thoughts are wretched companions. But my duty is clearly to set down the whole terrible story, or as much of it as may be while my right hand remains upon its arm and my head upon its shoulders. If ever I am asked, "What became of the Prince of Han?" I must have the answer ready, an answer embracing the entire chain of events. And if the question, on the other hand, should never be asked, no matter.

We came, at length, to the last four of the scroll pictures. One, woven in colored silks and gold thread, was a majestic representation of the Dragon Boat Festival at Ch'ang Ngan. The second portrayed the Hills of Longevity (Shou Shan). The third, while wanting in the magnificence of the Dragon Boat scene and in the mystical beauty of the Shou Shan, set my heart to fluttering weakly, helplessly; for it was nothing else or less than the famous Silk Weaving. Most of us have seen copies of this whole series of pictures that represent so fully and beautifully the art of sericulture through

its consecutive steps. . . . There it was, the interior of a simple house in the country, with the two women working at the great loom, one below, performing the actual work of weaving, the other seated on the frame above to push the treadles and help in fixing the threads. It is true enough that the picture told her nothing of the origin of the silk; but I feared it might have the effect on her exuberant young spirit of releasing it from the enchantment of the shining gifts and of the passion of which they were the feeble material symbols, and turn her mind back to what must have been, however confused with more personal motives, the cause of her presence here. And I feared, as well, the possible theme of the final scroll that still lay within the drooping lead foil; that it was another of the Art of Weaving Series (Keng chih t'ou shih). I had every reason to believe this, for the texture of the silk, the carving of the roller ends, tassels and tags were identical with those of the scroll in my hands.

So I covertly watched the Queen as I spread out the picture; and Mosulla discreetly watched her too. I saw her eyes widen; and saw after that how she glanced hastily upward at the smiling Prince, and then downward again to the picture, and then, apparently, at the floor, slightly pursing her lips.

The color fled for a moment from her cheek, and then as abruptly returned. She lifted her long lashes and soberly considered the scroll, and I felt rather than saw in her eyes the eager metallic flash of a sword-blade. She even lifted that look to her Prince — her Prince and mine — and he smiled more tenderly and caressed her shoulder.

When, I ask myself now, have girls not desired at once a lover and wealth? Here sat, robed in richly embroidered satin with a Queen's ornaments on her pretty head, a girl with a princely lover within touch and vast empires to the West and to the East (so I am sure she believed) within immediate reach. Why should she not, in her impetuous brain, think she could hold one while she reached for the other?

She asked, then, swiftly, what the picture represented. I responded frankly, for it would not do to hesitate or evade with those rapierlike eyes searching me, telling her that it represented the weaving of the silk. And I translated both question and answer unflinchingly to the Prince, who nodded pleasantly. . . . How odd it is that these lovers have but their senses in common! I am the only possible medium of communication between their minds. . . . Mosulla followed, demurely and with a bearing and voice of perfect respect, saying

that the threads as they were spun from the plant were transferred to these great looms; that I had so explained to her.

The Prince, quite as a matter of course, but none the less surprisingly to me, asked what she had said. The Queen watched all three of us, and, I believe now, instantly sensed my hesitation. I smiled then, and repeated all but that about the plant. Again the Prince nodded. But the Queen's eyes lingered on me.

My hands trembled as I drew out the last scroll. Again, despite a great effort of will, I hesitated; and still that eager girl watched me. . . . I slowly unrolled the scroll. My fear was fulfilled; it was that equally famous picture known as Boiling the Cocoons. There was the familiar compound, with the cauldron steaming under a matting-roof, with the woman seated by it, the child squatting to attend the fire, the other woman approaching with a basket of the cocoons, and a mother by the compound-wall where two neighbor-women peep over to admire the little man-child which she proudly holds up to their gaze. Each of you who may by chance read this has doubtless seen it a thousand times; possibly you have a copy of it hanging in the Kuei of your own ancestral home.

Rather quickly the Queen asked, "What is it? What are they supposed to be doing?"

Mosulla deferred to me. I was biting my tongue. The Prince bowed inquiringly; and when I repeated her question, he bowed again, with a degree of emphasis, and answered what I fear was an expression of anxious inquiry on my face with a crisp, "Tell about it!"

It was now, I knew, too late for any sort of maneuver. The Queen frowned a very little as she studied me, and a sense of utter wretchedness came upon me; for he is not destined to happiness on whom a Queen frowns. I admit to myself, now, miserably, that I was not equal to the situation. I was under suspicion. The Prince, even, had drawn his noble brows slightly inward. Mosulla was expressively silent. I couldn't leave her to suffer the consequences of her small lie; I must carry it on. . . . I hesitated yet longer, too long, and then explained lamely that the filaments of the silk plant are first, in their raw state, rolled into little balls and plunged into boiling water for thorough cleansing. I could not raise my eyes to her face. I knew only too well that she was continuing to study me. When I did finally succeed in stopping that wretched wandering of the gaze and respectfully looked at her, I saw in her bold eyes danc-

ing points of light like those on an eager sword-blade.

What this might mean I cannot clearly think. She still wore that intent frown. Did she divine that I was lying? Very likely. I must have presented a picture of unaccountable confusion. The Prince felt this. He was no longer smiling, but was studying me, with an occasional slightly puzzled glance downward at the Queen. I wonder, as well, in trying now by the sober light of the sun to reconstruct this difficult situation, if she might not have thought me suspicious of her profound motive. She would not tolerate this. She will not. And yet she must let me live so long as she wishes to communicate at all with my Prince, for her only path to his mind and his tongue lies through my mind and tongue.

It was Mosulla, again, who took unobtrusive command. She lifted her eyes once more to the east. Then she bowed low and spoke to the Queen, who started nervously, like the girl she is, and turned her head. I looked, too, as did the Prince. And off there, beyond the several li of dim flat roofs and the ghostly towers of the Eastern Gate of the city, we all saw that faint paling in the sky.

The Prince compressed his lips; then said, as if the words hurt him, "She must go."

The Queen, looking up, caught this meaning, I think. She lowered her lids with their lovely curling silken fringe and for a moment sat downcast. The color faded from her cheeks and temples, and her fingers moved nervously. I believe that she was, for the first time, afraid. She had flown forth on this adventure borne on a high wind of passion; but that wind was spent. She must now again risk her unique life in crooked dark streets. She must creep like a thief into the close-guarded Palace. The slightest failure in address, a very little bad luck, one slip of fate, and a scandal would blaze to high heaven, consuming, it was possible, two thrones. All this, I think, she considered now for the first time. Her fingers plucked and plucked at the embroidery that covered her knees. She seemed to me then, for the first time, almost like a child, quite a child, and I felt pity stirring in my heart. The Prince felt it, too, I am sure, for he knelt beside her and took her tenderly in his arms.

For a brief time she surrendered herself to this protecting embrace; but then slowly, unhappily, she got to her feet. More than ever I felt her youth. She was a tired little girl who didn't know what to do. She even yawned, and then smiled wistfully.

Then, looking out again toward the east, she

stood erect and compressed her lips, and something, a little, of the fire that belonged in her eyes crept back there. She was rallying; there is fight in the girl — spirit — something. It occurs to me that even the fitful cruelty in which she has indulged, as all the city knows, may be just a high spirit that has been guided in no true way. Luxury surrounds her, but what can she know of culture? There must have been a culture of a sort in Balkh; I catch here and there faint echoes of such a quality. They speak well in the markets of her Greek ancestry. But she barely knew her parents. And the atmosphere about the Throne changed vastly, it is everywhere said, when Ibn Shu Ber rose to power.

I saw her under lip tremble then, and a film of moisture in her eyes. She caught a little sob, turned to the Prince and flung her arms about his neck and wept there. He, too, was moved beyond his strength. To me he said, as he caressed her hair and patted her quivering shoulder:

"Tell her to change her clothes quickly and we will mount your fleet horses and ride for our lives to the East. Tell her that she shall be my first wife, Queen and Empress of Han and of the world."

Brokenly, for my own eyes were filling, I repeated this.

But the Queen shook her head. When she could speak she said: "We could not even pass through the city gates."

For a little longer she clung to him; and then, raising her tear-stained face to his, she called out, without looking even in my direction: "Tell him I will come again this next night." I translated. The Prince, very soberly, bowed.... "And tell him that I wish one more gift from him." These words came swiftly and somewhat formally. I could not help thinking that they were a speech she had learned and felt herself impelled now to utter, however mechanically. I am certain that she could not have been wholly in a designing mood. She is too young; she was utterly shaken. It is true that when we lose our self-possession we are quite likely to give voice to whatever desire we have brooded over longest in our unconscious daily reverie. She was, I prefer to think, repeating her lesson now. She went on:

"Tell him that his silks are the most beautiful thing in the world. Tell him that I wish the seeds of the silk that I may plant them and grow them and myself, with my ladies, spin beautiful garments."

I translated again. And he assented instantly. She looked up into his eyes. I had no need to repeat his words.

But he said again: "She is to come with me and be my Empress. I can live with no other. Without her I do not wish to live at all."

Again she shook her head, when I had found words in the Yue Che to express this splendid yet heartbreaking desire.

"They would not let me!" she wailed unhappily. "They would never let me!"

Mosulla touched her. The light was spreading in the east. She tore herself from his arms, looked out with sudden terror in her eyes, caught Mosulla's wrist, and fairly ran away over the roof. I heard her saying, over and over, "I will come again! I will come again!"

I have never known time to pass so slowly. I wandered to the parapet and looked over into the shadowy sweet-smelling garden. I could not talk with the Prince; he had dropped on the divan among all the gifts, his face buried in his hands. She could not take them with her, that was plain. Nobody can say now how they are to be conveyed to her. But the Royal robe she took, and the sleeveless coat she wore beneath it, and the headdress.

Of the latter Mosulla must have made a bundle in some sort of a rough cloth, for I could see that the slighter of the two figures that at length slipped out through the garden carried such. And

she merely put on her robe and hood and veil over the other garments.

When I next went to the Prince he said shortly: "I will sleep here," and stretched himself out on the divan; adding, as shortly, "Leave these things as they are."

He is sleeping up there now, with that precious loot of the Palace of Lo Yang strewn all about him. Even the opened bales and the bits of cut rope and the knife I used still lie about the Maracanda rug.

I went down into the garden after that, and waited. Through the tall poplars the eastern light rose high in the velvet sky; little by little the stars faded out; a faint tint of rose came and deepened and spread and then caught fire and turned to copper and finally to red gold.

Hiding in the shrubbery near the gate, starting like a hunted criminal at each small sound, I heard at last a light swift step and then, not the grating of the key, but a tapping. I opened the gate and Mosulla, breathless and very white where the forehead and temple showed above the veil, slipped within and, when I had closed the gate, clung to me.

"She asked for the key," Mosulla explained. "She vows she will come again to-night."

As we made our way through the garden among

the roses and the great still poplars and past the terraced fountain, I saw, at a window that I knew marked the end of the corridor without my apartment, a face that looked intently and then vanished. I hurried Mosulla into the house and then clasped her in my arms. I remember whispering as in a dream, close to her fragrant lips, "Thou art my beloved and my life!"

I put the child to bed then and came here to write by my window and to compose my mind. In some measure I have succeeded in this latter purpose. I feel chagrin now that at the most critical of moments I should have myself failed in address. By thus stirring the suspicion of this mad young Queen I may have intensified the danger of my Prince. Surely she knows that I suspect her. She will pass through many violent moods to-day. That is inevitable in the case of so young a girl who has abruptly taken so violent a step. In any one of these moods she may utter words or give herself to actions which in the next she will regret. The Wa zir will be, as always, at her elbow. He will perceive, even if he learn no direct fact, that she has been shaken out of all reason; for he knows her phases as a shrewd parent learns to know a child. In every look and gesture and petulant word the girl will betray her agitation. At such a time one

can only fall back on the teachings of the Master and in such serenity as he may be able to attain await the unerring action of fate. He has said: "Having heard the True Way in the morning, what matters it if one should come to die at night?" All human error is a result, as we know, of overstepping the mean. In my own passion it is plainly true that I have overstepped. I have surrendered my life to the guidance of emotion, and in consequence have, in a measure, failed my Prince. It is clear that I must correct this weakness.

That evening

I FINALLY slept. The Prince himself awoke me. I could not wholly conceal my surprise, though greater than ever is my need to play at his perhaps tragic little masquerade. Yes, Ch'ing stood over my bed and bade me arise. We broke our fast with wine and sweet melons and eggs and the flat discs of bread they make in this region. He asked about my horses, somewhat distantly, without deeper reference to the occasion of my words regarding their possible use in flight. I led the way to the stables, which are situated within a considerable walled enclosure beyond the garden with a gate that gives on the side street. It was not without pride that I found for him a seat on the steps and had the hos-

tlers lead out my beauties one by one. Nor could I resist covertly watching his face as they paraded by us, first the three geldings, then the eight fillies, then the eight mares, with the high-head Roxana last but one, and my own glorious bay, Mosulla, last. I spoke to her at once; the hostler released the halter and she came eagerly to me. I fed her a little almond paste from the palm of my hand, and all but two or three of the other animals at once exhibited a desire to follow. Accordingly, I signaled the men to release them, and they trotted toward us, nosing in and crowding one another aside as playfully as children. I sent for more of the almond paste, and while the man was gone Ch'ing found great interest in stroking one and another of the delicately drawn muzzles and examining the beautifully soft round eyes and the inturning ears and the silky coats.

Later the nineteen animals were returned to their stalls, and two men led out the dapple-gray stallion. Ch'ing, who was throughout the morning so moody and silent that I could find no way to renew more sanely than had been possible in the night my warning regarding the conspiracy, at this point fairly lost himself. He sprang to his feet and despite the warnings of the hostlers went fearlessly up to the splendid beast, stroked its shoulder, ex-

amined its flank and perfectly turned legs, and with his eye measured the bold head, the arching strong neck, the deep and wide chest and the rather short trunk that belied the wide stance of the feet. The animal regarded him nervously, but stood in unaccustomed quiet under his cool sure hand. I observed that all the hostlers bent interested and admiring glances on him.

He remained out there when four men brought forth the blood-red stallion. I had it in mind to protest, but hesitated. In spite of his simple secretarial costume and his unassuming enough manner he had never appeared to me so completely the Prince. I was humbled before him.

One of the men called to me to draw him back to the steps, but I could no more have spoken to him then than I could assert myself in the presence of an Indian magician. He went directly up to this most savage of animals precisely as he had done with the other, and actually laid his hand on the glistening shoulder.

The stallion's nostrils were distended instantly; the eyes protruded and the magnificent head was tossed upward. A polished hoof, at the same time, pawed the ground. But Ch'ing spoke, very quietly and evenly, and stroked that quivering flank. Then he walked deliberately over to me, threw off

his cap of black silk with the red knot and then removed his robe, standing before me in his short house coat and trousers and uttering a simple, "Hold these, Jan."

I was speechless; really, for the moment, breathless. The stallion watched him, all nerves, ready at the slightest off-turn of events to plunge, kick, and bite. The men, plainly, were on edge with apprehension. Ch'ing was the only wholly composed being within the enclosure. He walked quietly back to the stallion, firmly stroked the shoulder and gently patted the fine flank; then, before I could catch a breath, twisted his fingers in the luxurious mane and vaulted to the creature's back.

The men scattered as if on a signal. For a breathless moment the stallion stood rigid; then, as if wild with fear or anger, leaped high in the air and went plunging like a mad beast about the stable yard. I can see it all now — the hostlers running this way and that and crouching in corners; that splendid vital horse rearing and bounding and plunging; and Ch'ing sitting erect on his back with muscular legs gripping his belly and continually talking in that even quiet voice.

Finally, to my amazement, the scene grew less violent. The stallion came to a stop and stood trembling under his masterful rider. And Ch'ing,

after dismounting and coolly patting the damp, noble head, turned him over to the now worshiping hostlers and resumed his robe and cap.

I could not speak. But, as we strolled back through the garden, he said: "With a few of those mares and that red stallion we can breed a race of horses such as no King of the Han has ever known."

It was on my tongue to retort, "Very probably, if we can free ourselves from the magic of this place and make it our business to get them safely over the T'song Ling." But, of course, I could not speak in this wise.

Indeed, it was clear to me, even at the time, that for all the story I had to tell this strange young man I must await an opening. He was, and is, turbulently in love. He is too young and too fiery of spirit to be reasoned with unless his mood invites reason.

After he had bathed and put on a fresh costume, we had luncheon. He drank more than to me seemed wise; though in this matter, again, it would hardly do for me to speak my mind. He was sitting then in moody silence when I proposed a walk about the city. I led him along one of the great stone-lined canals and through the market, which

was alive with moving crowds and the usual babel of chaffering and barter and the incessant sharp noise of the brass workers and the crowding through of the trains of asses and camels. He showed a casual interest in the hammered brass, and a deeper interest in the beautiful inlaid metals. And the rugs pleased him. Certain swords that he balanced and tested in his hands were, as I well knew, the finest that he had ever seen. And all the time, as we sauntered along, stopping at this and that booth, I studied covertly the gloomy eyes and the occasionally twitching mouth. I must say, in truth, that for a lad of nineteen who is in the thick of a tremendous emotional adventure he carries himself remarkably well. But I could see, all during the day, how torn he was; happy at times — his eyes would take on a dreamy expression and a faint smile would curl the corners of his mouth — and then utterly gloomy. All this I could, from my own mature stage of experience, easily read. I could feel with him, as well, how the object of his great passion was not given to him to keep at his will, as my Beloved was given to me, but could only steal to him through the night at a risk no mind could face with composure. . . . Truly passion is a devastating emotion, be it of rage or love (sometimes when I recall how I struck the beautiful

fragile face of my Mosulla, I think that the two may have one source), and it is certain that the Master moved with the utmost wisdom in erecting a system of philosophy in which no passion, no flaw in self-government, can find a place.

We went in the afternoon to the great Plaza before the Palace. I know that he was impressed. It may be that, as he gazed at the vast walls and the great structures of white marble and the surfaces of shining blue tile and the groves of flowering trees that could be seen above the walls, he was thinking, as I was, of the surprising beauty and even majesty surrounding the beautiful and madly daring girl who was and yet might not longer be his.

A game of polo was in progress, and for a time we mingled with the excited crowd. He watched every swift, skillful move of the horses, and once he joined heartily in the cheering; that was when a rider swept the ball adroitly away from an opponent and with a remarkable burst of speed, in which man and horse appeared to think and move as one being, carried it with repeated blows of his mallet down the field and drove it between the marble posts.

We left, however, before the game was over and walked on the city wall, as Hsu Shen and I used to walk at Lo Yang. This wall is about eight times as

high as a man, and four times a man's length in width at the top. The view, both over the city, in which so much fine blue tiling may be seen among the foliage of the numerous trees, and also out beyond the crowding suburbs to the irrigated farms and desertlike expanses of the countryside with jagged mountains beyond, is beautiful indeed.

Watching and waiting, tirelessly, I sensed no opportunity at this time to speak, though he did break out with this:

"Jan, do you believe she will come to-night?"

"She promised. And she took the key to the garden gate."

"Oh, she took the key?"

"Yes."

He stood looking out over the city toward the green area that marks the Royal gardens. Suddenly his eyes filled, and his young face worked.

"I don't know what is the matter with me!" he cried. "I am not myself. Sometimes it is real to me. At other times I feel as if I had dreamed the whole night."

I knew so well what delicious mad uncertainty was his.

We looked in on Lu and Wen. The house assigned to them stands upwards of a li from mine. I

had felt some surprise that they had not appeared during the morning. But a glimpse of them answered the question in my thoughts. They had found wine and women; and there in this strange house in a strange city, surrounded by servants with whom they could communicate only through signs, they were carousing. I experienced a feeling of disgust, but Ch'ing smiled. The women seemed to me common creatures. Doubtless Old Henna Beard, while generous, indeed, to me (however subtle his motive), was of no mind to despoil his harem of its treasures to gratify every passing visitor. I, as the first Chinese he had ever seen, had been fortunate, indeed.

During the return walk we passed two of the Roman soldiers. I saw how closely Ch'ing regarded them, and hoped he would ask a question; but he didn't at that time. Later, however, as the twilight began settling down over the city, and as we sat in the hanging window overlooking the garden, sipping wine, it seemed to me that his mind was coming around, in a troubled way, to reason of a sort. His nervous excitement had increased during the late afternoon, and the approach of the velvet dusk stirred him profoundly. He would sit biting his lower lip and staring out into the shadows, only to turn and drink deeply of the wine.

At length he said, abruptly:

"What were those soldiers we passed this afternoon?"

"They were the Romans."

"Who are the Romans?"

I told him. The impulse was hot within me to pour out an emotional exposition of our danger, his and mine; but it is reassuring now to reflect that I resisted this impulse. More than ever is it clear to me that I must patiently find my way into his excited young brain. I must do that if I am to accomplish anything at all. I really believe that I was quite my old quiet self — outwardly, that is — as I related all that I had been able to gather up from Mosulla and in the markets regarding the power of Rome. And he seemed really to listen, with only an occasional and momentary wandering of the attention as his eyes roved moodily over the path that leads through deep shadows to the garden gate. He has, after all, imagination; and the story is dramatic and exciting in the extreme to one who has supposed the world to be only that comparatively small disc that we, everywhere, in China, have always understood. Fortunately, too, of course, his mind was prepared for this climacteric narrative, as mine had been before him, by the marvels he has seen since crossing the T'song Ling.

I told him of Greece and Egypt and Antioch and Mosul and Parthia and Ecbatana and Trebizond, and then something of the threatened eastward march of the mighty Roman armies that hover even now on the Parthian frontier. But then I felt the warm color coming into my face and my tongue faltered.

"Well," said he, "what is it? What are you leading up to? It was so you looked last night when you were telling the story of the Cocoon Boiling."

I stared at him, but could not answer. Once again he frowned; but still that palsy lay upon my tongue. How could I tell this boy — he is but a boy! — that the woman he loves is intriguing through him to rob his country of its wealth? How could I so speak at the very moment when he eagerly and romantically awaited her coming?

"You spoke, too, of a conspiracy from which I should flee. What is it? Do you think to frighten me with women's tales of danger?" He drank again. "Are you trying to tell me that this" — he snatched the pouch from within his coat and took out the tiny painting — "that this is part of a conspiracy?"

He must have read affirmation in my face, for he said, almost angrily, "But I know that she is only a girl! She would not do that."

I could only move my head. He stared out at that deeply shadowed path. Now, I knew, was my chance. The attachment between these young people was not yet love, it still was nothing more than romantic excitement; there might yet be time to carry him, by reason, out of it. And he had given me my opening. And then, as I thought swiftly of all I have read and learned, of the noble teachings of the great, words came to me.

"The Master has said," I began, "that he is a sage who neither anticipates deceit nor suspects bad faith in others, yet is quick to detect them when they appear. I will ask you to recollect" — how strange it was to speak thus colloquially and familiarly with my Prince regarding a great matter of statecraft; yet such is our masquerade, and such my unworthy part in it! — "the tens of thousands of camels your eyes have beheld plodding westward over the great desert. Nearly all of them were bearing silk to the frontier which now you know well. There the merchants of Balkh take them and bring them still farther to the west in order to sell them to the Romans, of whom I have told you. You have seen to-day in the bazaar immense quantities of these very silks. No one can estimate the magnitude of this traffic. It is the richest commerce in all the world. And this is true because the

ladies of Rome will wear, at whatever prohibitive cost, the silks of China. Were we to lose this great market, there is not a village in Ch'in or Lu or Wu or Yueh or Ch'u but would become sensible of the deprivation, not a simple home-compound but would feel the blight of poverty. To extend and protect this wealth General Pan Ch'ao, building on the foundations of those who have gone before, has conquered and organized the vast Northwest."

While I feel, even now, that my presentation of the matter, however inadequate, carried a degree of force, yet I experienced at the time, not without discomfort, something the sensation of a master lecturing an unruly pupil. It is true that he listened; but his eyes wandered ever back to the darkening garden. I could not be sure that I was reaching the good that I know is in him. Still, he listened, and I pressed on.

"You have seen the mulberry tree growing plentifully along the highway and here in Balkh. Surely it grows farther west, even to the sea that bounds the earth. Cultivation of silk with success here in the West would entail, therefore, nothing more serious than importing a small quantity of the eggs. You know how rapidly the moths can multiply. Let the culture become established in the West and China will suffer an injury that

never can be repaired. It would be, indeed, irreparable."

Suddenly his fine eyes swept about and fastened on my face.

"Tell me," he said sharply, "when you explained the Cocoon Boiling, were you truthful?"

"Forgive me. I was not."

"Well!" said he. And again, "Well!"

"It was to dig to the root of their intriguing with the Throne of Han that I was sent to Balkh. I have fathomed it. It is Rome that offers to conquer and then surrender Parthia in payment for the secret of the silk. And I have heard further that a threat accompanies the promise."

"A threat to invade Balkh?"

"Yes."

"Are they strong enough to do that, these Romans?"

"I believe they are."

He sat meditating. Then, suddenly, his face working in that same profoundly emotional way, he cried out:

"But she herself needn't have come to me — like that!"

"True. Regarding that point I am myself somewhat puzzled."

He emptied his cup; stared for a long moment down into the garden; and then rushed away. I heard him running up the stairs and then crossing the roof to the pavilion.

That is as we left it before dawn; with an Emperor's gifts strewn about, and bits of rope and matting and lead foil on the floor, and a knife. He would not let me touch an article. And I have shut the servants away.

The next evening

She did not come. There has been no word. Mosulla does not understand. I permitted her to go to the Palace this afternoon, but she was denied access to the Queen.

It has occurred to me that the Palace has taken no action whatever regarding Lu. He comes as an accredited envoy, and is, of course, of higher rank than I. There has been no audience, there have been no gifts; only silence.

This I learned from Wen and Lu. They are still drinking. It is discomforting to reflect that the falsity of Lu's mission appears to have undermined his character. The journey, as he well knows, is but an adventure; and he is behaving like an adventurer.

Another day

She has not come.

To-day Ch'ing said, "You think me weak, Jan, I know. But I cannot go before I see her. I know it is not her fault. I *know!*"

He, too, is drinking steadily. What is to become of us!

Yet another day

The danger has been, of course, that he will attempt some desperate act. He has been very difficult. My heart aches for the lad.

This afternoon I fairly dragged him from his cups and led him out for a walk. On our return we stopped at the house occupied by Lu and Wen. The street door stood ajar. This, naturally, surprised us. We stepped within. No servants appeared. We called aloud, and then went on from room to room.

In the sleeping apartment we found them. Their throats had been cut.

We buried them ourselves, as best we could, in the garden; and then returned here. No grave-mound marks their last resting-place; no prayer-papers will ever flutter above it. And even yet Ch'ing begs for one more day. What can I say? My life is his. I have done my uttermost.

Before we know what life is, how can we know what death is? (*Confucius.*)

Another strangely silent day passed. The red sun shone warmly down on the peaceful city. From the roof, gazing off eastward beyond the walls, we, Mosulla and I, could see the antlike trains of camels plodding in over the highway, and we knew that they bore the silk that flowed unceasingly, like a river, toward the west. Within the walls we knew, as well, the life of the city was going on without thought of the few strangers that dwelt fearfully in a spacious house surrounded by servants who were spies and clinging to life by a thread as slender as that we unwind from the cocoon. Down in the narrow streets men in robes of brown wool and white wool and of cotton went about their daily business; demure women who wore heavy veils over nose and mouth and cheeks walked sedately to the bazaars; trains of camels crowded through and asses laden with bulky panniers; hucksters of sweets and nuts and water and wine sang quaintly their wares; squads of soldier police cantered by without concern for the ragged children that played on the pavement. Even in the house those shrewd, respectful servants perfectly were at their various tasks.

The difficulty to me (Mosulla was clear and

practical to the last) lay in believing that what I had beheld with my own eyes could be so. With the soft sweet wind that blows down the valley of the Jon River fanning my cheek, with those pleasantly confused sounds of the vast city touching gently my ears, I had to tell myself, with a nervous inner effort at emphasis, that in the pavilion here on the roof, the blue tiling of which glistened so prettily in the sun, lay strewn about, coated now with the powdery dust that hangs always above Balkh, the array of priceless gifts that the Son of Heaven himself had laid adventurously at the feet of a wayward Queen. I had even to remind myself that Lu, the Duke's son, and Wen Fui, the friend of the mocking smile, lay dead among the worms, the benign spirits of their ancestors lost forever to their erring souls; for the Duke's son and the Mocking One had, for the last time, overstepped the mean.

The Prince, I am sure now, was himself torn by much such a struggle with reality. All day he wavered. He would not go out. The hope that was eating his heart had led him beyond reason; he even thought, I believe, that she might come to him in some disguise through the very light of day. Most of the time he kept in his apartment. Each time I saw him he was pacing from wall to wall. I

thought of caged tigers. He was not afraid; he was never afraid; but his young spirit, after that mad race across the world, had suffered a shock. Certainly he was less sure of himself. He permitted me to plead with him; even, in the afternoon, made some effort to meet my arguments. Yes, I can see now that he was experiencing a falling-away from the high enterprise of that first day and night.

I laid before him Mosulla's plan that we ride out of the city in the afternoon dressed as for an exercise canter, without led animals or even saddle-bags, and then, once safely beyond the suburbs, begin the desperate ride eastward. Mosulla herself rides like an athletic boy. But he would not consider this. In vain I pointed out that clear to the T'song Ling the great continental highway is plain to the simplest traveler; we could not lose our way. And Mosulla feels certain that they could not arrest us in our flight save by determined pursuit. They have no homing pigeons, she says, though the older peoples knew their value and the Romans here recommend their use. But the Balkhans are, it seems, under this Wa zir, an enfeebled people without military alertness. All here is luxury.

Mosulla urged me to clear up the pavilion and hide away the silks and bronzes and jades. But my Prince had forbidden me to touch a single ar-

ticle there; and only himself went in among them. There they all were — the marvelous gauzes and the precious old embroideries and the woven velvets lying about in confusion where Roxana had pushed each away to reach for some new amazing fabric and stroke it with her pretty fingers, the amazing carven stones and the woven pictures heaped carelessly on tables and divans and even on the floor, crowded together about the legs of one of the tables. Even the travel-stained matting and the bits of lead foil and rope, and the knife I had used, lay on the rug where they had fallen.

It was nearly evening when for the last time I brought argument to bear upon the Prince. He had gone up to the pavilion and was sitting there where she had sat, on that divan, immovable save that he kept drawing his upper lip in between his teeth, gazing out into the copper sunset with the eyes of one who broods and heavily dreams. I had made an excuse of carrying up the brazier filled with fresh coals.

I contrived to resist the natural impulse to fall upon my knees and bow to the floor, and not, at that, with any great difficulty; for so closely was my life intertwined by this time with the life of the Son of Heaven, if I may be pardoned this familiar manner of intruding my worthless self, that I saw him

less, actually less, as the Prince than as a boy who was in love and in deathly trouble — a shaken boy, a boy who had dared beyond the strength even of a Prince, and now found himself torn by emotions that passed his understanding (as certain not wholly dissimilar emotions had long since passed mine). He knew, I feel certain, that he had overreached. Wild as had been many of his acts, he was by no means insensible to his exalted position nor to the grave responsibilities that at the expiration of the Regency will rest upon his strong young shoulders. He knows that China has had experience of good kings and evil kings; and I am sure that he would wish, in his heart, to be loved by his vast people. And while I and other teachers have found him at times a somewhat impatient and even insubordinate pupil, still he could not fail to absorb a considerable degree of learning. Well enough he knows that saying of the Master: "If the ruler cherishes the principle of self-control, the people will be docile to his commands." And well enough he knew at this time that his self-control had flown from him. Too, he had read in the Book of History that admirable precept: "If you show a sincere desire to be good, your people will likewise be good. For the virtue of the prince is like unto wind, that of the people like unto grass. It is

the nature of grass to bend when the wind blows upon it." — And so it was not at all as an under-secretary of the eighth mandarin rank that I now addressed my Prince, but more, profoundly more, as a teacher speaking to a willful but well-loved pupil.

"Your Majesty . . ." I began.

He waved an impatient hand.

"Ch'ing, my friend" — thus I took up the thread — "to whom my heart and my life are pledged even more deeply than to my parents, the moment has come when I must, however unworthily, intrude to urge upon you —"

Again he waved that slender strong hand.

"To-morrow, Jan, we will go," he said gloomily.

Again his eyes sought the burning west, and his upper lip drew in between his teeth.

It was a dismissal, yet I lingered. Once before he had said, "To-morrow"; but we had not gone. I stood there, thinking swiftly of strong words that might stir in him the sense of duty that mingled at times, I feel certain, with the impulses arising from his unruly young blood; but he was like a man who sits alone on a mountain peak. He did not turn again. I do not think he even knew when I moved away and walked slowly across the roof to the parapet that overlooked the garden. There I stood

for a long time, I do not now know how long. The dusk came slowly down, enveloping the city and quieting the hum of day noises. The burnished red heavens lost, little by little, their color. Stars, a few, peeped out, and then others, as if encouraged by the first, took their bright places in the cool velvet sky; and I felt rather than observed the blue light of the moon. . . . I did not sit, but stood there, almost without moving, until the last of the street sounds had died, save for the barking of a dog here and there, and the light in the west had softly flickered out, and night hung its folds about me. I did not even hear Mosulla until the rustle of her silken trousers sounded at my very elbow and a little arm slipped within mine. . . . I was thinking, if the truth were told, of my life; of the old lost orderly living, of study and quiet thought and the pleasure of my poems which have come so often into my receptive brain like flower-petals blown softly into a garden pool; of our life at home, the walks in the garden and the library pavilion there where so often my father and I have talked about the difficulties that beset a young student and about the perfect teachings that have so fortunately come down to us from the splendid past; of the jealousy between Sing's wife and Kuei-ti's and how they quarrel bitterly at times; of Pu's third

daughter with the goitre that had swollen enormously and hung down upon the breast of the poor child; of my dear friends, in particular Hsu Shen. I fell to thinking then about the work to which Hsv has dedicated his well-ordered life and how it was a splendidly creative idea to find lodgment in the brain of a modest student; for Hsu is busily compiling the first collection ever made of the ten thousand characters in our written language, with full explanatory notes of each, its history and its shaded meanings. He calls the work the Shuo Wen, and in the interest of permanence has chosen for his language-medium the Lesser Seal style. He had actually succeeded, before I came away, in arranging his references under a comparatively few radical parts of characters that were chosen as indicating the sense-direction of the whole characters; had, indeed, reduced his index to fewer than six hundred such radicals, he told me one day. No one has ever before hit upon a way to do this. Hsu Shen, it may be, is or will become a great man. I miss him deeply. I miss his enthusiasm, his dry humor, his finely companionable spirit, his bright interest in the theater and dogs and flowers and good wine — though now I know that he has never tasted good wine; such cannot be made from grain.

And once again I was thinking about Mosulla, her frank ways, her beauty and grace, her bright spirit that is eager and free yet never bold, and wondering how I could ever introduce her into the house of my father; this, considering the bare possibility that she and I both might live to travel so far. Would she not wilt and die there, like a flower transplanted to inhospitable soil?

Well, that question is answered now, forever. My heart aches and is a numb thing. I live in a haze of unreal, flitting countrysides among which I have no place. My existence is, indeed, a shell in which only an empty echo remains of living, breathing, beautiful things.

This lamp is an abominable thing. There is no woman servant at hand to tend the wick, and it gives a flickering ill light by which I can form these characters only with the greatest difficulty. Indeed, all this wretched calligraphy must needs be copied if ever I can convey it in safety beyond the oh-so-distant T'song Ling. Yet surely there are moments in life, high sober moments, when the form may properly be neglected in the interest of the thing itself. When I consider that no one but I will ever be able or moved to set down all that has taken place, and that if it be never set down an

hour of history will be forever lost to those who are to come after us, I feel driven to my task. Certainly, if I wait, much will be forgotten; a detail here, a strong fact there, something in the bewildering sequence of these strange events that might account for what followed; and the least service I can render is to complete my story while it still throbs like a breathing, living thing in my brain. True, I am nodding with weariness, my back and thighs ache, and I yawn repeatedly; but in what conceivable measure can these things matter? Who am I that my comfort need be considered? Though to my descendants, if any such are to spring from my loins, it will be a comfort to know that according to my own poor story I served my Prince faithfully to the last.

Each time that I lift my brush to consider a fact or a phrase, I can hear the animals stirring and munching their food. I can even hear them breathing. The room we occupy is but a crude cell, with an earthen floor in which the k'ang stove spreads the noxious fumes of burning charcoal. Outside, in the crowded, littered court, are piled bales upon bales of the silk that pours irresistibly westward; I saw them in the afterglow, when we rode in.

Some rest I must take, for this is our first opportunity to lay down our throbbing heads; a few

hours I will sleep, before dawn again illumines the highway. But I must keep close in my brain the thought of waking early. We must be off with the sun.

Hurriedly, therefore, I resume the narrative.

Standing there by the parapet, Mosulla clung to me for a time — a long time or short I do not know — and then placed a warm hand over my mouth and swiftly turned her head and listened. And then, with her, I heard a distant, faintly grating sound. At the instant, though my skin turned cold and my brain stopped short its gloomy imaginings, I failed to understand; until Mosulla had slipped away from my side and was running across the roof with the light sure feet of a deer, I did not begin to understand. Then I heard, as faintly, the creaking of a rusty hinge, and a door or gate softly closed. It seemed to me, after that, that a long time passed, a long time in which no living thing stirred or breathed. Still later, I thought I saw, very dimly, a moving shadow below in the garden, among the heavier shadows of the poplars and the black areas where, I knew, were the clusters of sweet-scented rose bushes; it was a movement not unlike the shadow a flying pigeon will throw upon the ground that passed from the garden door be-

neath me toward the gate. Another long period of time seemed to pass, and then two shadows flitted toward the house. I moved — my body was trembling, I know, and my lips and mouth were dry — moved irresolutely toward the stairs, only to pause in the shadow of the pavilion. I could not think what I should do. Not a sound came from the pavilion where the Prince sat on that divan where she had sat, delighting in his love and in the treasures he had brought from the Throne of the World to lay at her feet; but through the lattice I could dimly see him, sitting with his noble head sunken into his hands; the moonbeams slanted in upon him, and a very little light came from the glowing brazier.

I heard then from the stairway the sound of light, quick feet; and went directly into the pavilion, saying as I lighted the three lamps, simply, "She is here."

I saw that he lifted his head and bent haggard eyes upon me. They were, for the moment, unbelieving eyes; but then he, too, heard those prettily hurrying sounds — on the very roof, by this time — and got slowly, even painfully, I thought, though with a great hope blazing up in those weary young eyes, to his feet. And then, all in an instant, she had flung off her cloak and hood and was cling-

ing about his neck, sobbing somewhat and murmuring little broken phrases of love in the Yue Che, while he, straining her to his breast, spoke as brokenly and as ardently in our own tongue.

How strange it is to think now that these two had not one word of spoken understanding between them, that only with their eyes and their burning hands could they tell each other some small part of the content of their eager hearts. Each had given all. Each had braved death; they were braving death now. Strange it is, too, to reflect that however greatly a Prince and a Queen they were, after all — they are, indeed — but a boy and a girl whom the spirit of adventure had led into adult passion only to trap them here and hold them helpless. . . . They even laughed, this boy and this girl, laughed softly in the face of death as they clung together and as she stroked his smooth short hair and he held in his hands her proud head about which the short thick hair bobbed prettily and gazed deep into her smouldering dark eyes; and then, suddenly deeply sober, they kissed in the manner of the Yue Che.

I found the situation unbearable, and made to slip out of the pavilion. Fear seized upon me, wholly. All at the moment I realized that she could not possibly have made this second visit un-

observed; for Queens cannot wander alone at night about any city in the world. But before reaching the door I felt Mosulla's detaining hand. And then followed what seems to me now the strangest, most incredible moment in all this drama of passion and catastrophe. Mosulla, when I stopped, faltering, and turned to her, slipped within my arms, looked up with shining sad eyes, whispered, "She loves him! It is terrible!" and pressed her lips to mine. And there we stood, two pairs of lovers in close embrace, on a housetop in Balkh, lost momentarily to the dangers that encompassed us about, utterly forgetful of the amazing fact that one couple were but an under-secretary of the eighth rank and a slave from the harem of a Semitic Wa zir whilst the other were a reigning Queen who sobbed, a broken girl, on the breast of the majestic Son of Heaven. Has this bewildering old world, I wonder, ever before known precisely such a scene?

The Queen it was who spoke.

"Tell my Beloved," she commanded, without so much as lifting her pretty tousled head from his breast, "tell him that his friends are dead, that the Wa zir will slay him in the morning — say that I am watched, that doubtless to-night I am followed — say that at dawn he must flee, when the city gates are opened, dressed in a costume of Balkh, as

a merchant or a servant — say that one day, if he wishes, I will come to him and be his slave, but now he cannot be saved in Balkh — at dawn he must flee."

With a full heart I translated the words to his waiting ears. Knowing all this, she had come alone through the night to save him. And even now there was no fear in her proud eyes, only passion and firm purpose. The girl who had barely known her noble parents, whose formative years had been ruled disastrously by that scheming, ever-debasing old red-beard of a Wa zir, showed now her inborn mettle. Love had touched her heart, had opened it and let in the light; and I perceive now that it seemed to her a simple business to sacrifice herself without question, if need arose, in the effort to save her lover. In spite of that degraded Court, in spite of the evil gray web that has been so long woven about the soul of this green girl, there is, indeed, nobility here. I can even now feel again the catch in my throat and the strange wild tug at the strings of my heart as I told him, respectfully, what she had said.

He listened like a king; then gravely smiled.

"Say to the Queen of Balkh," he commanded — and there she was, all the time, close in his arms — "say that if she will fly with me I will go.

Say that the soldiers of my greatest generals will protect her generals from the Romans. Say that she shall be my first wife, my Queen, my Empress, that she shall rule, with me, a kingdom that is ten thousand times as mighty as Balkh."

With tears in my eyes, I repeated this in the Yue Che. The Prince watched her now; and I watched her, and Mosulla. We saw confusion on her face, and bewilderment; and then a slow light in her eyes. Closely the Prince held her, stroking her hair; gazing down into her face that his love had illuminated and softened. It seems to me now that she literally could not think the problem out. She hadn't the experience of stern living; she was but a spoiled girl changed overnight by the miracle of love, shaken, softened, sweetened, stirred, and raised to the supreme heights of self-forgetfulness, yet, as I say, confused. But she could feel his arms about her supple body, his strong brave eyes searching hers, his sweet breath on her cheek. The tears welled suddenly in her eyes and fell on her cheeks. She lifted her face to his.

"You will come?" asked the Prince, in Chinese, ignoring me.

Unobtrusively I translated.

"Yes," she murmured, brokenly, "I will go with thee to the uttermost ends of the earth. Thy life

shall be my life, thy home my home. If they slay thee, by thy side shall I die."

This, too, I had to repeat. And then Mosulla softly drew me without. I pressed my cheek to hers, there in the outer shadow, and found that it was wet.

"It is madness," she whispered, "but, O my Beloved, it is beauty!"

Again it was Mosulla who heard first. She caught my wrist and led me on tiptoe to the parapet that overlooked the front street. At the sound of champing, stamping horses and jingling accoutrements my blood seemed to freeze.

The horses were backed into a line against the farther wall of the narrow way. The soldiers talked in groups or found seats along the curb. There were twenty or thirty of them; enough, surely. Two officers stood apart. Just beyond the line of horses I saw His Excellency's litter resting on its four carven legs, with the huge black slaves that always bore him leaning against a building and mopping their sweating faces. Below a door closed. Those precious servants, surely, had opened. Then followed a long silence. I moved once to warn the royal lovers; but Mosulla restrained me, and I caught the point readily enough.

We were all helpless, utterly. There was but the one stairway down into the house. The end seemed upon us. All we could do was to cling close together during the moments that remained to us.

It is curious now to reflect on the considerable length of time that elapsed. Certainly it seemed considerable. I have wondered much since whether he was looking about from room to room, or questioning the servants, or both. Naturally, of course, he is deliberate in all his movements. Whatever quickness he has is all in his clever cold brain. In his use of that, I find myself sometimes thinking, he is gifted beyond the reach of normal men. Mosulla says it is a trait of his race; that they are a people unrestrained by the traditions of the great landholding civilizations, able to think in matters of trade and political intrigue always more swiftly than these other peoples, and perhaps with fewer scruples, or else with scruples of some other alien kind. She says that another people, the Armenians, who dwell to the northward of Mosul, have similar keen traits and are gifted with a similar enormous and unerring instinct for material gain. A few such persons will fasten themselves on a village community and little by little, through shrewd advantages in trade and the lending of money, acquire a death-grip on the entire traffic of the place.

Then the simple village folk, smarting under injuries which they cannot wholly understand, turn on these parasites and drive them forth or even slay them. It is a conflict of natures ineradicably different.

Strange, indeed, are the ways of men! In the beginning Semites and Armenians both are usually frugal and industrious, setting up neither decent standards of living nor limits on their hours of work; but all are easily spoiled by success. They have no rational philosophy; only some sort of queerly mystical religion in which bloodshed plays a strong and, to me, repulsive part.

An odd fact, as I think back over the entire shocking experience and try to piece it accurately together in terms of memory, is that he should have (as apparently he did) not only mounted the roof-stairs alone, but actually come unattended into the house. I think, from something she said at the moment, that Mosulla attributed the fact to his colossal and fatal vanity. And vanity, doubtless, did figure in it. He seemed to feel safe enough, here in the heart of the city that he despotically ruled, with a squadron of his own household troops, officers and men, standing before the house, armed for instant action; and, supported in this powerful way, he would have found perverse de-

light, I think, in intruding boldly upon a Queen and a King. But my own idea, further, is that he did have it in mind that the soldiery and servants were not to see, with vulgar eyes, the Queen. For he must have had yet, in his scheming brain, important need of her; and this not only for his inordinate intriguing, but also profoundly because she stood before that debauched people as a living representative and symbol of an ancient House. In the face of all his wealth, his political skill and strength, his army, stood a bit of a girl who did not yet know life soberly and who feared and tacitly obeyed him, yet who was surrounded by ancient and imponderable forces that he could use but could not himself merit or even so much as understand.

But my brush wanders in a tangled forest of words. It is fact that he came, amazingly, alone. We heard first that heavy, slow step approaching the stairway through the corridor beneath; then a pause; then the deliberate tread-tread of flat feet on the stairs. Mosulla kissed me. I moved then nearer the pavilion and stood waiting, with my Beloved every moment at my side.

He came waddling in his pompous way from the stair-head out into the moonlight that so softly, so poignantly bathed the clean white roof. It shone somewhat on the glossy dye of his beard. He saw

us, and I think he smiled; certainly he stood before us and bowed. He was cool, suave, implacable. The strength of the situation was in his hands, and he gloried in it as such scheming and acquisitive natures glory always in power.

"Ah, Jan Po," he said, bowing slightly and clasping his hands before his breast somewhat in our fashion, "it is a pleasure, indeed, to find you at home."

"And it is, indeed, a pleasure," I replied, "to find that Your Excellency can unbend to make himself at home with me."

Mosulla's fingers were pressing my arm as if in warning; but I was unafraid. Indeed, the thought came that it would be a pleasure to spring at this beastly sybarite and throw him down on the roof and trample savagely on the fat stomach. To be sure, I reflected, during that moment of swift wild thought, his abject screaming would bring the soldiers in a moment in upon us. But they could hardly be permitted to kill us like pigs as they or their kind had killed Lu, the Duke's son, and poor Wen Fui; certainly not for this had my Prince been lured across the world. No, Old Red Whiskers needed us. I perceived that, exultantly.

His eyes glanced beyond me toward the pavilion; and I turned. The light given out by the three

lamps within the structure was little stronger than that of the moon without, yet I (and he) saw a tall figure rise from the divan and come to the door. And I (and he) caught a sound that was not quite a muffled cry, but more nearly a gasp, and I (and he) knew that a bewildered girl, who was also a Queen, had heard his voice. He moved forward, but the Prince more swiftly and vigorously strode out and confronted him.

The Wa zir bowed, not quite low enough, and without true respect in his squinting eyes.

"Your Majesty!" he exclaimed softly.

The Prince bent his stern gaze on me, and I translated. And it seemed to me that the Son of Heaven experienced something in the nature of relief. Young, bold, eager, he disliked the nature of intrigue. Frankness he preferred. And since, so clearly, all was known, he could at least, now, speak his mind.

"You have intruded," said he, through me.

The Wa zir bowed again. He had no spirit, only schemes.

"His Majesty should know why."

I thought, at this, that the Prince might strike him, as I had so longed to do. But the Queen, who would not hide away in a corner, rose from the divan and came proudly into the doorway.

The Wa zir bowed again, with half a smile, and moved toward the pavilion. The Prince looked at the Queen, and then strode after him. And then we all were within the spacious compartment, standing, for the moment wordless. Ibn Shu Ber Din looked about him; caught sight of the golden vessels and the bronzes, of the exquisite silks and embroideries and velvets, of the carven jades and nephrites, and the corners of his sensual, cruel mouth curved again in a wicked smile and his pig eyes glittered. It was said of him everywhere in Balkh that more than all else in the world he loved his rich possessions, his rubies and jades, his strong boxes heaped full of golden coins — coins of Cyrus and Darius and Iskandar and of a recent Western Emperor called Nero, of Egypt and Greece and Ind. But silks such as these he had never seen, nor such jades; for all this scattered and littered collection of priceless art objects were from the Imperial Treasure. Never before had vulgar alien eyes beheld such. And I knew, as did the Prince and the Queen and Mosulla, from that glitter in his, that he saw them as already his own. But he succeeded, in a measure, in controlling his greedy spirit.

"I regret deeply the urgent necessity for troubling Your Majesties," he said, and paused for me. "Were it within my power, I would gladly offer

to Your Majesty" — this to my Prince — "every courtesy, even complete freedom. But the duties of a statesman weigh heavily on weak human shoulders. Our unworthy country is harassed and threatened on the west as on the east by strong powers. We must make what shift we can. Those on the west will be appeased by one small gift. They ask the seeds, in quantity, of the silk plant. In self-defense we must endeavor to gratify their desire. It is my simple duty. In this small matter, I feel certain, Your Majesty will gladly and freely aid us of Balkh. And, therefore, I have come to suggest, most humbly, that Your Most Gracious and Excellent Majesty abide with us during such time as may be consumed by the meritorious Jan Po in journeying eastward and securing for us a caravan-load of the seeds. I assure Your Majesty that your person will be inviolate during the necessary delay. I might further add that it will give me and Her Majesty and all the Court the deepest pleasure to send with him, as a gift to your people and yourself, the horses which have been collected for him and which are now in the stables adjoining this house. To this end I have had prepared a tablet bearing my personal seal which will pass him and his animals through every city gate within our modest kingdom."

He was proposing to hold the Son of Heaven as a hostage! During a long moment, as I fingered the golden tablet which he had placed in my hands, I was speechless. But at length I found my voice, and translated every word of it. Once, when my memory faltered, Mosulla softly prompted me.

"I thank Your Excellency for his consideration" — thus the Prince, speaking calmly and with perfect dignity of bearing — "but I fear it lies beyond my power to grant your petition. The seeds of the silk are China's treasure. In the Empire of Han respect for law is universal. Even a Prince may not transgress the accepted principles by which his people are governed."

"That," said the Wa zir, "is unfortunate, and adds heavily to the difficulty of my position. It is my profoundest hope that His Majesty may dwell within the walls of our city in the luxury due his exalted station until such time as the arrival of the seeds shall make possible for him a pleasant journey over the distant Eastern Mountains into the lands of his own glorious and illimitable country."

"It is with regret that I reply that my journey must be undertaken at once, Excellency." And the Prince's eyes met, as he spoke, for a brief moment, the darkly questioning eyes of Roxana.

"With still deeper regret am I forced to inform His Majesty that soldiers of the Household Troops await my signal at the door below."

After I had rendered this incredible speech into Chinese, there was a long pause. I saw the Prince move deliberately nearer to Roxana, who slipped her hand into his and held it so tightly that her fingers and his were rimmed with white. I saw the corners of Old Red Beard's mouth curve again a slight way upward as his little bright eyes surveyed them. And I saw the Prince glance, then, thoughtfully, downward at the ends of rope and the knife that lay among the torn bits of lead foil by the side wall.

The Wa zir's sinister smile broadened. "May I venture," he said, craftily, and speaking, for the first time, more to me than to him, "to recall to His Majesty that a caravan-load of seeds would be but a poor recompense for the privilege of enjoying the person of our Queen?"

I saw the hot color surge into Roxana's beautiful face. The Prince, too, saw that, drew closer to her, and asked quickly, "What did the scoundrel say?"

I hesitated. But the situation had to be met, and by me alone. None other could serve. Accordingly, in as level a tone as I could, I translated.

The Prince did not flinch. Indeed, he seemed to

be considering the problem as gravely and honestly as if it were a mere matter of statecraft. He even asked, very quietly, "Did he say that?" — and when I bowed my head continued his sober reflection.

But after a moment — Old Red Beard was still smiling in that hideously insinuating way — he glanced almost carelessly about, caught up one of the silk gauzes, crumpled it in his hand and passed it to me, with the contemptuous remark:

"Stuff it in his mouth."

I obeyed instantly, and fastened it there with another strip of the gauze which Mosulla quickly handed me and which I knotted behind his neck.

"Better tie his hands and feet, as well," said the Prince.

It was the Queen, I think, who picked up the first bit of rope. I held his arms behind his back while Mosulla firmly tied them. She was remarkably deft and sure with her little hands. It seems to me now, as I try to piece together in memory this extraordinary scene of violence, that she uttered, in the most matter-of-fact way imaginable, a number of little practical suggestions as to the best way to secure the man. I recall, further, that the fat body thrashed about a good deal until the Prince himself held his legs. We tied those, also.

And he made unpleasant faint sounds, like a pig in a bag.

Confused as the whole business is yet in my memory, certain details are clear. At that moment, I am certain, not one of the four of us cared about either life or death. The soldiers might have mounted the stairs and come straightway in upon us, and yet we should not have cared greatly. I do not, in general, condone any sort of violence. And despite its important uses in military and state affairs I really dislike torture. I have always turned away my eyes when a public executioner, in the streets of Lo Yang or Chang Ngan or P'ing Ling (yes, even during my youth in the old town) administered the seven cuts before beheading a culprit. And this even when in my heart I knew that the severity of the punishment was deserved.... In a degree, now, I do not like to recollect that on this one occasion I myself wholly overstepped the mean. But still there was a grave instinct of justice that surely underlay all we did. Here in our hands, helpless at last, lay the writhing scoundrel, the cheap adventurer, the cheapener of souls, who had debased a kingdom and insulted a Queen. No punishment could be too severe. The only regrettable aspect of the event is that it did not take place in the great plaza before the Palace with all Balkh

looking on. The populace would have been delighted, surely, in his ignominy.

This miserable lamp seems to be guttering out. . . .

I have found another wick in a cupboard, and a small quantity of oil. The watchman is passing now, beating frantically his gong. The night is passing; it will be the hour of the monkey before I know it. I am exhausted, yet staring awake and fired with a feverish energy. Doubtless I am by this time too tired even to rest. And rest, a little of it, is vital to us. But it is vital, as well, that the true history of all that has passed be set down, faithfully, in order. As the Master has perfectly said: "The higher type of man makes a sense of duty the groundwork of his character, blends with it in action a sense of harmonious proportion, manifests it in a spirit of unselfishness, and perfects it by the addition of sincerity and truth. Then, indeed, is he a noble person."

We stood about the thrashing, pitiful object from which those little muffled groans came continuously, and again I thought of the utter want of dignity in the man; he had only vanity and cupidity. He was a degraded thing. I loathed him. And then the thought came that only by the fortunate

accident of the vast numbers of inmates in his harem and the casual element of time had Mosulla been saved from him for me. At this I felt again the unruly desire to do violence which the mere sight of his vulgar person had of late aroused in me; and, forgetting not only myself, but also the Queen of Balkh and the Son of Heaven, who stood thoughtfully there, considering gravely their fate, I leaped with my two feet upon the protuberant middle of that writhing body. The sounds changed then in character; they became abrupt and jerky. Twice or thrice I jumped up and down; and then, quickly (in a frenzy, indeed), I knelt on him and dug my thumbs into those staring eyes. And while the confession may be to my shame, I exulted in this savage deed. Even now I exult in the memory of it.

The Prince drew me away. It seems to me now that he was laughing. Then, very quickly, and with the manner of one who disposes of disagreeable business, he picked up the knife, lifted the head of that which had been Ibn Shu Ber Din by the henna-dyed beard and deeply slit the throat.

The blood spurted upward, I remember, like a little gushing fountain, so swiftly that we all sprang back somewhat. The Prince wiped the knife clean on the Wa zir's cloak and thrust it into his girdle. And the Queen, staring at first in a

horror that she would not have felt so deeply, I think, before love opened her heart, threw her arms about the neck of my Prince, who was as well her Prince, and sobbed like a child. The man had been, after all, her mentor, really her ruler; and childhood memories weave deeply into the patterns of our thoughts, coloring our feelings toward those who have sat above us, however unworthy later mature judgments may prove them to have been.

Mosulla was the only one of us who thought to step to the door and glance toward the stairway. I noticed this, and went to her side.

"Listen!" she whispered.

And then I heard the soldiers talking quietly and laughing among themselves, below, in the street.

"We must fly now," said Mosulla.

"Speak with the Queen," said I to her; and then myself turned to the Prince. Mosulla, in quick and understanding obedience, touched Her Majesty's arm; for such, it appears, are the primitive ways of this kingdom.

"O Son of Heaven," I murmured, bowing very low, "the night is advancing. But there is perhaps time to disguise hurriedly the Queen and her who is the wife of my unworthy self, take the horses

from the stables and ride eastward. It is possible that they have not surrounded the garden. And the tablet of the Wa zir will pass us through the city gate. It is my belief that it would be well if Your Majesty could so condescend as to disguise himself as my servant."

He smiled a little at this, but seemed to accept my point of view; turning, however, with a look of tender inquiry to the Queen. To her Mosulla was swiftly translating what I had said.

It was then for the first time that the possibility of another view than that held by us might appear in the situation, that it might even prevail, occurred to me. And the thought, like the later event, was confusing in the extreme.

Ever since, during these three desperate days, I have been putting the little pieces of fact together in my brain, fitting them this way and that in every imaginable combination, as one fits together the pieces of a puzzle. At the moment, and on into that first day of our flight, I believed that it was nothing more than the stubborn whim of a bewildered girl that tore so our hearts and turned the currents of our lives into what cannot fall short of loneliness, persistent regret, wretched unhappiness. Other thoughts that came were that I had failed, that even my Prince had failed in some way

to rise above the situation, master it, turn it into the channels of our own love and faith. Though when he would have turned back, at the end of the first day of flight, it was I who restrained him. And he, after all, could not master the event because he could not so much as speak to his beloved. He was really, sorrowfully helpless. The fault, if fault there was, is mine.

There are dramatic moments in life, in certain lives, where faiths conflict so deeply that love, hope, all personal desire, sinks inevitably into second place. Through one such moment, I believe now — I nearly believe — we lived that night. Certain it is to me, that, when the young Queen straightened herself and with frankly tear-stained face gazed down at that obscene object on the rug, I saw, or felt, in her eyes a dignity that I had not before seen there. And in selfishness my heart sank, for it must have read, dimly, something of her purpose. Yes, my heart knew before my ears heard or my brain understood that she, rather than my Prince or myself, was the one among us who would master the event.

I think now that her earlier impulse to fly with us was not unlike the impulse of a child to escape a hated guardian. But the hated guardian lay now dead at her feet. She was free, and she was Queen

of Balkh. The blood of Iskandar, that greatest of Western conquerors, coursed in her veins. She would not go. When my Prince, fairly broken at the bare thought of losing her, caught her in his strong arms and held her tightly to his breast and murmured her name as he had heard it uttered in the Western speech and kissed her in the manner she had taught him, she sobbed again and clung to him, but would not go. Through her tears she begged me to explain.

"Tell my Beloved and my Lord," she murmured brokenly, "that I shall take no other husband. Tell him that perhaps we shall have a son, and if so I will rear him to be King in Balkh. One day, if my Lord so chooses, he will come again over the mountains and make me his bride, indeed. But I cannot fly from my throne like a thief, at night, and I cannot now protect him."

It was very difficult for me to translate this. I knew, as he knew when the words fell stumblingly from my lips, that with chance and the years and the whole wide world lying between them, they might never meet again. And her sudden high mood would rule the night, whatever terrible uncertainty might lie before her in the day and in bewildering days to come.

And so, at the last, it had to be.

We, the four of us, peeped over the parapet. The soldiers were standing and sitting about, chatting as before. The bearers of the Wa zir's litter were playing at some game of chance on the pavement. We tiptoed down the stairs. The Prince, I felt then, as now, was stirred by her noble spirit to a deeper sense of his own duty than he had ever felt before, for without a word, heavily, he permitted me to attire him as a servant.

Like ghosts we slipped through the garden, under the tall, silent poplars and among the rose bushes whose scent I shall never know again excepting in the poignant echoes of secret and sacred memories. There was no guard at the gate. The Prince himself stepped without; stepped gladly forth. I think he would at that moment have welcomed death. And then, when he had returned, and the Queen, who was a Queen, indeed, had for the last time pressed her lips to his and her throbbing heart to his own, she took Mosulla's arm and whispered through a sob, "Come with me, Mosulla—" and then, with a little rustling sound both were gone. It was not even my privilege to kiss my Beloved. She was gone.

I am afraid I was like a man possessed of devils. It was my Prince who came first to reason. He laid a firm hand on my shoulder.

"Come, Jan," he said, very simply, like an unhappy boy; and led the way to the stables. Only the night watchman was there. Him the Prince thought it wise to kill, with the knife he had brought along. Ying, gasping and speechless with fright, found us there. I had forgotten him.

We saddled the bay mare I called Mosulla for myself and the dapple-gray stallion for him. I myself saddled a filly for Ying. The Prince wished at first to ride the red stallion, and did, indeed, after a struggle, saddle him. But as there was such grave danger of injury, and as that noble but wild-hearted creature would not follow and could never in the world be led, I persuaded the Prince to leave him, saddled as he already was. As I confidently expected, most of the other animals followed. Each of us led two, leaving those who would to follow behind. Altogether we took thirteen, and still have twelve.

Dawn was streaking the eastern sky when I presented the Wa zir's tablet at the wall, and the city was already stirring about the business of the day. Carts were creaking through the streets, and the first trains of asses and camels were moving. We rode quietly until the suburbs had dropped behind, and then lashed out. The horses liked it so much that it was difficult to quiet them down as we

passed through villages and by government stations. Their endurance, these three days, has been amazing. I change at intervals of a few hours, from Mosulla to the strongest of the geldings; the Prince changes from the gray stallion to the mare Roxana. We both regret that the red stallion had to be left. It is China's loss.

We have eaten what little we could as we rode. I estimate that this day-and-night cantering has carried us over the great highway at a rate of not less than three hundred li each day, or close to one thousand li thus far. At that rate I do not believe the soldiery can catch us, particularly as we are riding so light. And the Queen is on our side; though we must not embarrass her by any lagging. We shall press steadily on. The horses were exhausted when we stopped in the evening, but the night's rest will refresh them. The Eastern World has never seen their like.

The Prince is ten years older; a man, indeed. He is gravely kind to me, but does not smile. I can see that he thinks much of his people, and of the great privilege that will one day be his of serving them as a world-ruling Emperor. It is a profoundly sobering thought. We do not speak of the Queen. We cannot. The furious drive of our flight is a blessing; we speak only of that, and of

the horses. One comes swiftly to love these spirited and noble animals.

He is sleeping now in the adjoining room.

One wise act I thought to do: I slipped back to the roof-pavilion and in that defiled air gathered up those pictures of the Boiling and the Weaving. The secret of the silk is safe yet and will be so long as ourselves are safe.

Written in a suburb of T'ai Can

My Mosulla, of the gentle and generous spirit, you who have taught me what it is to give, never again shall my eyes behold your face. Never again shall I see your perfect body in the dance. Never shall I know that touch of your lips which is in memory a prayer of my spirit. Only your Queen could have taken you from me. Your soul is mine, but your life is hers. My soul is yours, but my wretched life is my poor gift to the Son of Heaven. I hasten across the earth to a land that was my own, where the freedom and the grace and the open heart, that are to me the lotus blossom and the spear-orchid, cannot be found. Among those of the lily feet I shall move sadly with averted face. I shall lie alone on the Sitting Tiger Hill and gaze with unhappy eyes into the sunset.

At Jauzgun in Badashan

AUTUMN sits whitely on the high hills. In the valleys of this fertile kingdom the men are gathering in the grain and the strong women are treading out the purple and yellow grapes in the wine presses. I eat the mutton and eggs and cakes and drink the wine of the country; I ride hardily throughout the long day; I am strong and firm of flesh and burned by the sun; but I am an empty man. We are as two deeply sobered friends, the Prince of Heaven and I. This evening he permitted me to quote to him the words of Confucius:

"If a man can reform his own heart, what should hinder him from taking part in government? But if he cannot reform his own heart, what has he to do with reforming others? A virtuous ruler is like the Pole Star, which keeps its place while all the other stars do homage to it."

"That is it, Jan," he said, moodily. And then — "I have lived only for myself, friend Jan — only for myself."

Strongly, now, I feel purpose in him. I am proud to serve.

A day's ride beyond
Night, mountains
A month has passed since we left Balkh

THIS is the way of it. We rode along a narrow defile with the weary horses at a walk. We have only ten horses now, but, fortunately, the dapple-gray stallion and the two fine mares, Roxana and Mosulla, are among them. A filly and a gelding fell out last week; and another filly became so wind-broken and lame that we had to request a native bowman to kill her. To both of us it was like killing a friend.

To resume: As we rode up the pass we saw a lake bordered by trees that were bronzed and gilded and reddened by the frosts. The Prince first saw a circle of blue and red tents on a promontory. He pointed. I stared, and then found my heart beating like mad within my breast. Even in the distance we could make out the long ranks of tethered horses, and knew that they would be small and shaggy, with perhaps a few of the somewhat larger horses of the So Kui region for the officers. But there would be none to compare with these splendid tired Arabs we rode or with the others which followed like dogs.

A breeze came down the hillside, and suddenly we beheld the yellow-dragon flag float out above

the blue and red circle. Through a mist, with a sob in my throat, I glanced at my Prince and saw that he humbly, not speaking, bowed his head.

Sentries received us, men of our own people, and led us to the central tent. The commander was one Ch'eng Po-i, of whom I had seen a little at So Kui. The sentry withdrew. Ch'eng dismissed his attendants; and then dropped to his knees and thrice touched his forehead to the rug.

"Please!" said the Prince, motioning him to stand; adding, with gentle dignity, "At Lo Yang, yes; but not here."

Ch'eng then stood, but was ill at ease.

"Then," remarked the Prince, "my journey is known."

"To General Protector Pan Ch'ao and to myself, Majesty. There were advices from the Court. My orders I beg unworthily to show Your Imperial Highness."

He wore them in a bag about his neck, and hurriedly got them out. I thought mournfully of the bag which the Prince wore secretly about his own neck, containing a tiny portrait on ivory of a Queen who had adventured and lived and then turned, as now had he, to duty.

The Prince read the brief orders; and then, to General Ch'eng's plain amazement, handed the

parchment to me. I hardly knew how to accept this mark of friendship and confidence. Thus it had been during the weeks of our desperate ride; at evening, in the unkempt little inns, among the traveling merchants and ill-smelling muleteers and villainous camel-men. But here, in the tent of a General . . .

The orders were marked secret and personal; to proceed through the country beyond the T'song Ling and there find a certain personage known among those close to him as Ch'ing and bring him safely back. The force was small, but carried with the flag a threat of vast armies to follow. I returned the parchment in silence to my Prince who restored it to Ch'eng. We all three bowed.

We led him forth then to see our horses. Already willing hands had brought them food and had set at cleaning them. The Prince, speaking always in the simple person of Ch'ing, asked that they be released, and at once they came to us, crowding about and nosing for sweets. Mosulla rested her fine head on my shoulder, her silky cheek above the sensitive nostrils caressing my own; and my eyes filled. Ch'eng was excited over them. The younger officers crowded about in wonder. And the soldiers, hundreds of them, admired.

To me, then, the General spoke.

"Excellent Jan Po, the General Protector has told me of your errand to Balkh. It gives me pleasure, indeed, to testify that you have fulfilled the commission with complete success. And in thus commending you, I am conscious of speaking also for him. For much store has he set on this search for the perfect horse. You have brought a stallion, mares, and fillies, all the finest the world has ever beheld. From them shall derive a new race of splendid beasts for the Court of Heaven and the commanders of His Majesty's armies."

I had forgotten the possibility of personal success. My heart was not here; it was in Balkh. And my eyes were still wet. But I recollected myself and bowed deeply. And the Prince said to me in a low voice, and, I thought, with a sigh, "I wish he might have seen the red stallion."

General Ch'eng has given me letters. One is from Hsu Shen, written before he could have received mine from So Kui. No man living writes a letter richer in classical allusion or more charmingly alive with humor. He speaks of evenings in the wine shops that pass drearily without my presence. Hsu loves me. His skillful, thoughtful phrases and fine word-patterns picture for me as could no other brain and hand the pleasant life I have lived among

my own people; and yet it is all strange to me now. It saddens me.

My father writes, too; kindly as always. Him I revere profoundly. But the little tales of our household at Lo Yang chill my heart. He, they, all of them at home — can never be told what I have seen and experienced. They can never know what I have become. My father speaks gently of my long-delayed marriage. It appears that he has communicated with a neighbor, the father of a beautiful girl who has been trained to perfect obedience, who weaves silk with exquisite skill, who would be a wife in a thousand.

How can I tell him that a wife exists in a distant city of which he has never heard and whom I shall never see again, whom I have married after the manner of her own people, by the breaking of bread? How can I tell him that I seek not obedience in a wife, but companionship? He would not understand that at all. And how can I convey to him the truth that there can never be other than the one woman in my heart?

The wife of Lo Yang would hobble about pitifully on her lily feet, a crippled thing.

In me two civilizations that can never meet in understanding have found a battle-ground. My heart lies helpless between the stones of the mill.

Doubtless they will grind me to pieces. Perhaps it is better so. I hardly care. Little is left to live for. Memory is the solace of old men. I am an old man. Let life go. I do not care.

But I will write reverently to my father, telling him certain of my strange experiences. The story of the beautiful horses will interest him. He will be delighted to know that I have served well his old friend, General Pan Ch'ao. That he will understand.

We shall be somewhat delayed here. General Ch'eng has sent forward to T'ai Can a hundred of cavalry with native interpreters. We must have passed them during one of our night rides. It is strange that they have not already heard of us and our horses and followed us back through Badashan; though they may now be doing this. No body of troops, however small, could move with the speed employed in our flight. And this larger expedition will crawl back over the mountains like a huge snail.

I grow impatient. But to what end?

Ch'ing — again I have learned so to speak of him and to him — came to my tent to-night. He found me writing by the light of a single wick. He

came simply as my friend. I sent at once for wine, and we drank; in silence, at first. He and I need no words. Slowly, deeply thoughtful, we sipped.

"In a little time we shall drink this wonderful wine no more," said he, at last.

I could not speak.

Again he broke the silence. "Though I do not understand why our own people could not learn to make wine from grapes. While it is true that the fruit is little known among our people, we have some excellent old vines in the Palace gardens. They were brought from this very region, some two centuries ago, by Chang K'ien. It should not be difficult to propagate the vines widely. It is lighter than the wines we make from grains, but much pleasanter to the palate."

"Yes," I assented, "much pleasanter."

He refilled his glass, and then mine. I found myself unable to lift a hand. He drank more deeply. I felt his eyes on me, closely studying me.

"Poor old Jan!" he said.

And then my small effort at composure died. I broke down. I was like a child.

"It would not be so difficult," I cried, "if I could bring myself to understand it. But I was plunged into it with no preparation. I was bewildered.

And to have it end like that, abruptly, as if the whole terrible experience were but a whim of the gods, designed to torture us! Sometimes, when I awake in the morning, I think I have dreamed it. But then my eyes open, and I know that it is all true, and my heart dies in my body. I do not know what is to become of me. I cannot go on in the old routine. I am shaken. I am afraid."

"It has been," said he, "like a battle. A young man is thrust into the army. He is conveyed to some unfamiliar place. Suddenly, then, he is plunged into mortal combat. He does not know why. He cannot understand. He is frightened. He loses control of the simplest bodily functions. But within the short space of a few hours his spirit is carried through every degree of terror, horror, anger, pity, brutality, idealism, bravery, exaltation, ecstasy. Then, in some strange way, it is over. He is back at routine. He finds himself bewildered as we, Jan Po, you and I, are bewildered now. He looks about on the world and does not recognize it. He, like us, has been shaken and changed. He is even, after it is over, afraid. Terrible and wonderful pictures come into his brain at night. That is why we see so many men who were sensitive boys before they entered the army walking about the world with quiet, strange eyes. You

and I are doomed to walk about the world with quiet, strange eyes. . . . Drink, Jan Po!"

I drank deeply. But I was excitedly on edge.

"Why need this thing have happened to me?" I cried, in my anguish. "I did not seek it. I was content to go along my simple way as a philosopher and poet of humble attainment. I was content to be an under-secretary awaiting modest advancement."

"It is true, Jan Po," said he, very thoughtfully and sadly, quite as if he and not I were the elder man, "that you did not seek the adventure that has overthrown the peaceful structure of your life, that has" — he paused — "broken your heart. But can you not see that in this respect you are the less unfortunate of us? Can you not see that I, with a sorrow as deep as yours, must face in addition the truth that I have brought it on myself? Sometimes, at night, it seems to me that I have murdered my friend Lu."

"Oh, no!"

"It is the truth. First I corrupted him and weakened his will. Then I led him on a mad adventure to his death. And now, perhaps, it is no more than just that my heart, too, should be broken." His voice lost, at this, its gravely firm tone. Like my wretched self, he broke out in un-

controllable sorrow — "But you, Jan, had at least companionship. I had none. Only the one mad beautiful night that destroyed my reason. It is true that I shall send for her, properly, from Lo Yang to come as my first wife, my Empress, the Moon of my Heaven. But the Court will not permit that I go again to Balkh. And it may be that her people will not permit her to forsake them. It is very difficult. The weeks and months are passing. The years will pass. The water is running under the mill." His face worked. "I could not even speak to her!"

"Forgive me!" I cried. "I am unworthy to serve your meanest servant. I, thinking of myself . . ."

"Jan Po" — his hand was on my shoulder, my Prince's hand — "say no such words. Recollect that you have not only served me, you have saved me, saved me to the Children of Han. Not once, until now when the danger is over, have you weakened. Not once, until now, when your life is again your own, have you considered self. I love you, Jan Po."

We drank and drank.

Once again my tortured spirit cried out. "If only the end had not come in that abrupt way! If the Most Gracious Queen of Balkh had not changed!"

"She was right," said he, firmly. "She came

nobly, splendidly, to her senses. She could not desert her throne, like, as she said, a thief."

"But if only she had not reached out her hand and taken, in one brief word, my heart!"

He could not answer this.

Later we talked more calmly. He asked me, as friend to friend, what I purposed doing next. I hardly knew how to answer him. But it seemed to me then, as it still seems — yes, I am certain of this — that I cannot go back to Lo Yang now. I cannot mingle, as of old, with my own people.

He said then, gently:

"There is work enough for you here on the frontier. You know the country. You speak their strange tongues. Yes, you will be a valuable man. I will speak to General Pan Ch'ao about you."

This my Prince said to me.

Two weeks have passed since our arrival in camp, and the hundred is not yet back from T'ai Can. At first, after our arrival, I wondered why the Prince did not press on; but since have gathered that General Ch'eng has orders to keep him always within sight. This is anything but a desirable commission for Ch'eng. He may suffer later for it, when the Prince shall be King. But he holds rigidly to his instructions. The Prince knows, now,

I am sure, that he is being restrained. We are watched whenever we pass the lines. Something has clearly been said between those two.

I have borrowed from Ch'eng the Book of Odes, but cannot order my spirit. I cannot write. I did compose a verse to Mosulla, with the thought of sending it on by one of the silk caravans that daily pass the camp. It might somehow reach her. But I could not send it. It was written in the old repressed manner. It would have hurt her, as once before my poems hurt her dear spirit. And without her presence I cannot feel as she would have me feel. She was my flame; without her my heart is a charred coal.

The Prince believes that this is our most difficult time. The hard journey eastward, once we are really under way, will prove, he says, an immense relief. And after that, hard, hard work. Such is his spirit. We try to occupy ourselves with hunting the wild birds of the region and the mountain sheep with the great horns, but all this is nothing. As we ramble we talk, and this talk carries our minds always in a circle.

This is the truth.

An orderly called me to the General's tent. Ch'eng smiled as he greeted me.

"The hundred are approaching," he said. "And an advance courier brings word that a boy has joined them who speaks no Chinese but your name. He asks always for 'Jan Po.' If you will, therefore, await him at your tent, I will have him conveyed there immediately they arrive."

My heart beat high. I hastened to my tent, and stood by the entrance. I could not sit. The boy had not asked for Ch'ing, but for me. For me!

They were a long time in coming. I saw them first in the defile below the camp, a long line of them, riding dispiritedly, but could distinguish no person. Then they disappeared among the trees, and for a long, long time I saw nothing of them and heard only the lazy sounds of the camp, the whinnying and moving about of the horses, voices in a neighboring tent, a flageolet played with plaintive feeling by a soldier whose thoughts had wandered back over the great desert and the Heaven High Mountains and the Jade Pass into the land that is home, to him perhaps if not again to me. . . . I heard them, the feet of the horses on the hard-beaten way that winds up the hillside to the camp. I stood very straight and still. Curiously, this is one of the moments that I find most difficult to put together in my memory. I cannot seem to live it clearly again. I do not know what I was

thinking, or how long it was, or what was happening all so casually about me. It seems to me that certain of the soldiers passed, hastening to watch their adventurous comrades ride in and greet them. But even regarding these details my mind is not clear.

Louder they came. They were within the circle of the camp. They would ride, I knew, to the hitching-lines and there dismount; all but the commanding officer, who would ride through to the General's enclosure. The Prince lay in his tent. I had not disturbed him; had, indeed, blindly obeyed Ch'eng. . . . They came on, with a deliberate thudding of hoofs and a jingling of accoutrements and bells. I could not see the hitching-lines, but I heard the command to halt, and then the other thuds and thumps of many men dismounting. It was very near, beyond a double row of tents. Were Ch'ing and I housed in one of those rows and not here under Ch'eng's eye, I should have witnessed all this.

Four horses appeared then, three ridden by officers, the fourth — the fourth was the blood-red stallion ridden by a ragged slip of a boy! They crossed the area and reined up. One of the officers dismounted. I waited and waited; for Ch'eng had ordered me here. Ch'eng smiles, but is to be

obeyed. The stallion was thin. He did not curvet or prance now, but merely arched his neck somewhat and pawed at the ground with one restless forefoot and twisted his magnificent head around to look at his diminutive rider almost as if he sought reassurance. I could have rubbed my eyes. How that gamin could so have mastered the nearly wild beast passed my comprehension. The saddle, I could see, even at that distance, was the identical one the Prince had placed on his back in the night, that last terrible night at Balkh.

The impulse was hot within me to rush into Ch'ing's tent and cry out to him that the beautiful stallion was ours, ours and China's; but General Ch'eng had said to wait at my tent. I waited on.

The officer reappeared and remounted. Slowly, oh, so slowly, they rode toward me. Stiff as a seasoned soldier I stood. Before me they reined up. The Commander greeted me, and said, "I bring you a messenger, Jan Po." Then the boy slipped gracefully down from his seat, removed one of the saddlebags, and prostrated himself before me. I observed, not without alarm, that he neither held the bridle nor gave it to an officer, and moved a step toward the stallion. Even in his present worn-down condition it would not do to turn the splendid beast loose in the camp, for I knew well how un-

quenchable was the fire within him. But I stopped then. For the animal lowered his head, looked at the prostrate boy, and moved, deliberately, toward him, even bending his silken head lower and nosing the lad's travel-stained garments. I could not believe my eyes. The officers smiled, and the Commander said, pleasantly, "This lad could tame the tiger of the jungle."

My wits were all a-scatter. There, still, was the boy, forehead on ground, awaiting my will. His short-cropped hair lay raggedly on his fair young neck.

"Arise," I said, in a voice that seemed in no way like my own, "and enter."

I preceded him into the tent and turned. Somewhere I had seen the lad. Again he prostrated himself before me.

"Oh, my Master," he began . . .

This, again, is an experience that I find extraordinarily difficult to recollect clearly. I know that I trembled like a willow leaf. It seems to me that I sprang upon that strangely, incredibly masquerading figure, lifted it by the arms, and knew it for Mosulla, my wife, my Beloved!

Her tears lay on my cheek, as she strained against me. She said, "We must not think of ourselves now, O King of my Heart. You must lead

me to your Prince." Falteringly she said this, and turned to find the dusty old saddle-bag.

We composed ourselves, and went to his tent.

"King of the World," said Mosulla, her forehead yet again pressed to the ground, "I salute thee." Her voice, low-pitched and darkly rich in tone, trembled and broke. For the moment she could not go on. The Prince had been sitting over a table of rough wood of the region, his face bowed in his hands. In bidding us enter, he had merely raised his head. Now he regarded the bowed figure with the face of a man who has found means to fortify his spirit against the most severe blows of fate. It was a young, clean face; imagination dwelt there, and a sensitive, eager love of life and beauty, and yet I think now that I have never seen on the faces of old men, even of old women, so wearily sad an expression. I felt that I had not before sensed the depths of his sorrow during our ride; and I was ashamed, yes, ashamed of my present happiness. He had listened with a quick movement of the head when first she spoke, and now lifted his eyes to me in inquiry. I was able to utter only the one word of explanation — "Mosulla!" — when my own self-control gave way.

He bent forward then, very gently, my Prince,

bent down and touched her shoulder. "Rise, Mosulla," he commanded.

She did, I thought, make an effort to obey, but could not. Her tears were falling.

"O King of the World," she forced herself to say, "my Queen sends to thee by my poor hand her last message on this earth. Without the smile of thy majestic countenance she could not longer live. Nor could she bestow her love on one less worthy."

The saddle-bag she had been holding close to her dear body, but now she lifted it toward him in her two little hands, saying, simply, brokenly:

"The last gift of my Queen to the King of Heaven. By command of Her Majesty, I bring it."

He took the bag. It was of heavy woven material, with a pattern, I could perceive, under the dust and grime of the journey, like the rich bold patterns of their rugs. Slowly he unfastened the straps and took from it a shriveled human heart.

Motionless he sat, and motionless were we. I recall that a dog barked. That flageolet wailed its little distant song of exquisite homesickness.

He pressed the heart to his lips, as she of Balkh had taught him.

I lifted Mosulla and led her away.

For a long time, shut within my own tent, we were deeply silent together, my Beloved and I.

But later in the day her eyes became wistful, and she said: "O my Adored One, I have seen thee. Thou knowest I am thine. I can love no other. I am content. On the morrow I shall return to my people."

Timidly she said that. It frightened me. I held her in my arms and said, in her manner:

"Thou art my wife and shalt abide with me, sweet echo of my heart."

At So Kui

THE Prince of Heaven came to me at my inn. He, whose command it is life's greatest privilege to obey! And here he sat with me and drank. Until he rose to go, I did not read the purpose of his call. But then from his pouch he drew two parts of a tablet of jade on which were graven the characters of Royalty, and before my eyes fitted the broken edges together. Then he gave one part to me.

"With this in your possession, Jan Po, my friend," he said, "they of the Court can never keep you from me."

He bowed then and clasped his hands. Thus ceremoniously, as was fitting between friends, we parted. And he has gone, eastward over the Heaven High Mountains and the Jade Pass to serve his people one day as their Emperor and King.

Excerpt from a letter to Hsu Shen

Written at So Kui

. . . Much of this have I communicated to my Reverend Parent, but there is matter here which his more than excellent mind may perhaps receive with misgivings. Therefore I must beg of you, my old friend, to visit him at the house of my fathers and acquaint him in your own perfect language with all that I have written. It is my belief that he will in this manner find less to disturb his love for me and his high hopes.

Regarding my career, I have not told him of my promotion, but have preferred entrusting you with the task. Thus you will approach him bearing good news. Say to him that I delay writing this fully until I have all the stirring details in hand. Perhaps he will understand from your kindly lips better than from the colder characters of a letter that my knowledge of the barbarous tongues of these western tribes and of the geography of the region enable me to be of no inconsiderable value to General Protector Pan Ch'ao and open to me the possibility of much more rapid advancement than could be the case were I to return to the more familiar and also more crowded environs of the Court. I might further ask you to inform him that it has become my privilege to win, however unworthily, new friends of very high station indeed, on whom I believe I may count for help in the perhaps more rugged days to come.

When all this is clear to him, he will not, I trust, feel so deeply in the matter of my marriage. It is true that my wife does not yet speak our language, though she is quick of wit and studies eagerly. It is true, also, that she has the large feet and the strange round eyes of the

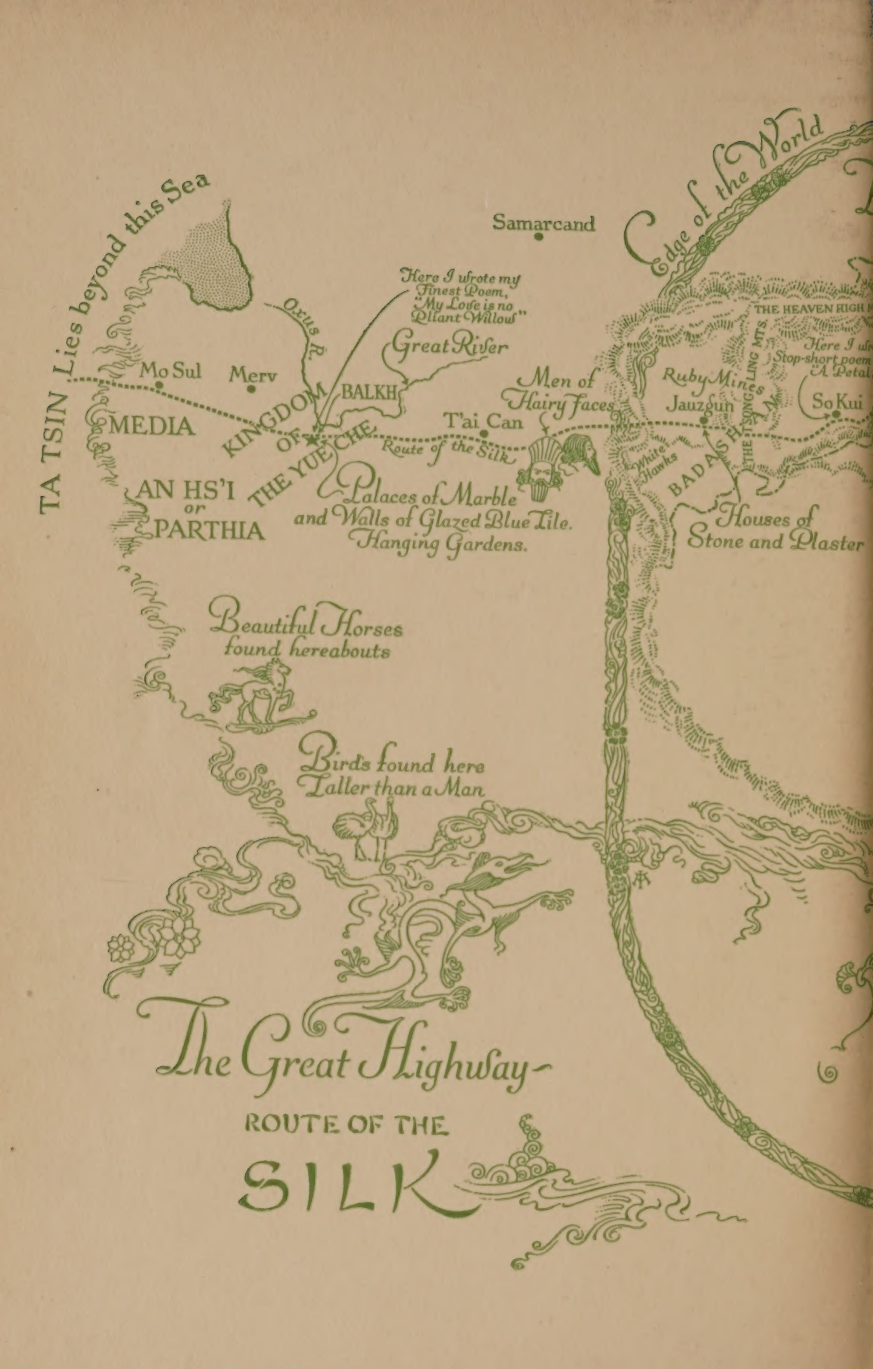
West. But I must ask you to assure him that I have not chosen weakly or beneath the dignity of my ancestral line. We must endeavor to make it clear to him that powerful empires and splendid cities exist beyond the T'song Ling that formerly we regarded as marking the edge of the earth. My wife has known two cultures that are less only a little than our own. She has known marble palaces and exquisite gardens and scenes of splendor. And I wish you would assure him that she is more than a wife to me. She is my companion and my friend. And my revered father should also know that she has been the trusted servant and, I may dare to add, friend of a Queen. Above all, he should know that.

And will you not explain to him, as well, that I cling without faltering to my study of the classics; that I think daily of his noble influence and of the precepts with which he ennobled my youth and guided my sometimes erring young manhood; that it is my hope yet to exhibit to him that firm character and sound reputation which would make less heavy on his heart the burden of his declining years?

"Better than one who knows what is right is one who is fond of what is right; and better than one who is fond of what is right is one who delights in what is right."

So he taught me in my youth, in the words of the Master of all thought. And so I now endeavor to shape my life.

THE END


TA TSIN Lies beyond this Sea
Samarcand
Edge of the World
Here I wrote my Finest Poem "My Love is no Pliant Willow"
Oxus R.
Great River
THE HEAVEN HIGH MTS.
Here I wr... Stop-short poem ... A Petal
Mo Sul
Merv
BALKH
Men of Hairy Faces
Ruby Mines
Jauzgun
So Kui
MEDIA
KINGDOM OF THE YUE CHE
T'ai Can
Route of the Silk
THE TSUNG LING MTS.
White Hawks
BADASHAN
AN HS'I or PARTHIA
Palaces of Marble and Walls of Glazed Blue Tile. Hanging Gardens.
Houses of Stone and Plaster
Beautiful Horses found hereabouts
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The Great Highway
ROUTE OF THE
SILK

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